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An investigation into
English Secondary
Headteachers'
Perceptions of the
extent of their
autonomy within
accountability
relationships— School
Improvement Partners

Susan Mary Tranter
Doctorate in Education
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CONTENTS

CONTENTS - 3 -

Tables and Figures - 8 -

Chapter 1 - 12 -

INTRODUCTION..... - 12 -

 WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT- 12 -

 THE NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS - WHY IT WAS NEEDED- 14 -

 The demand for greater efficiency in the inspection system.....- 16 -

 The emergence of school self-evaluation- 17 -

 The growth of data about school performance- 20 -

 THE NRWS- THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITY .- 21 -

 WHO SIPS ARE, HOW THEY ARE RECRUITED AND WHAT THEY DO- 23 -

 WHY I AM INTERESTED IN HEADTEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SIPS- 26 -

 THE HEADTEACHER’S JOB.....- 26 -

 THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SIPS ON THE CYCLE OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT.....- 30 -

 MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....- 31 -

 Key Research Questions (KRQ).....- 32 -

 THE APPROACH TO THIS STUDY- 32 -

 HOW THIS STUDY IS STRUCTURED.....- 33 -

Chapter 2 - 35 -

LITERATURE REVIEW - 35 -

 INTRODUCTION- 35 -

 WHAT IS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT?- 38 -

 What does it mean to improve?.....- 39 -

 What is the link between improvement and effectiveness?- 44 -

 How does self-evaluation contribute to school improvement?- 45 -

WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP?	- 48 -
Themes in partnership	- 49 -
The partner as the critical professional friend	- 50 -
Role of trust in a partnership	- 54 -
PARTNERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	- 59 -
WHAT IS AUTONOMY?	- 60 -
Themes in autonomy.....	- 61 -
What is an autonomous school?	- 63 -
How autonomy affects the way we act.....	- 64 -
WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?	- 65 -
Themes in accountability	- 65 -
How accountability affects the way we act.....	- 66 -
A spectrum of accountability for the headteacher	- 77 -
Surrogate accountability	- 81 -
The early responses to school inspection post-NRwS.....	- 83 -
Linking Autonomy and Accountability	- 84 -
SECTION 2.....	87
THE ROLE OF THE HEADTEACHER IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	87
How are schools controlled?	87
How do headteachers learn about school improvement?.....	88
What do the studies and reviews of the NRwS tell us?	90
SECTION 3.....	95
HEADTEACHERS AND SIPS WORKING TOGETHER	95
How headteachers might respond given what we know about autonomy, accountability and relationship management?.....	95
Chapter 3	98
RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS OF INQUIRY.....	98

INTRODUCTION	98
Designing a study	101
THE NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY	102
The different methodological paradigms.....	102
My approach to this research study.....	105
WHAT STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY WILL INFORM THE RESEARCH?.....	108
Quantitative and qualitative methods	108
CHOOSING METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION.....	110
How to measure perceptions and expectations	110
Accounts.....	111
Observations	112
Questionnaires	112
Interviews.....	113
Mixed methods	113
STAGES IN THIS RESEARCH.....	115
Creating a sampling frame	115
Advantages and disadvantages in sampling.....	116
Ethical considerations	117
A time series for the study	120
SUMMARY	132
What knowledge claims are being made?	132
Analysing the data from the semi structured interviews.....	136
Looking forward to the data presentation, analysis and interpretation.....	141
Chapter 4	142
HOW THE RELATIONSHIP WORKS AND HOW IT FEELS	142
INTRODUCTION	142
SUMMER 2006: BEFORE SIPS WERE DEPLOYED.....	143

The questionnaire	143
The interviews	149
Analysis of questionnaire survey conducted in summer 2006	155
SUMMER 2007: AFTER ONE YEAR	164
The headteachers.....	164
How the relationship has worked	165
How it feels.....	178
What portents the headteacher offers for the future relationship	183
SUMMER 2008: AFTER TWO YEARS	185
How it works.....	186
How it feels.....	196
How headteachers express their views looking back over two years.....	202
DO HEADTEACHERS TRUST THEIR SIP?	204
Chapter 5	- 209 -
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION	- 209 -
REVIEWING THE POLICY	- 210 -
ADDRESSING THE KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	- 212 -
EMERGING THEMES FROM THE STUDY	- 225 -
Do headteachers feel they have greater autonomy and increased accountability? ...	- 225 -
Does the NRwS represent a new accountability relationship?	- 226 -
LOOKING FORWARD.....	- 228 -
Areas for further research.....	- 231 -
A New Government.....	- 231 -
REFERENCES	- 234 -
Appendices	- 277 -
Appendix A	- 278 -

Appendix B- 279 -

Appendix C- 283 -

Appendix D- 287 -

Appendix E.....- 289 -

Appendix F.....- 293 -

Appendix G- 297 -

Appendix H- 319 -

Appendix I.....- 329 -

Appendix J.....- 331 -

Tables and Figures

Figure 1.1 A diagram illustrating the relationship between the SIP,
School, LA, NS, and other stakeholders..... - 22 -

Figure 1.2 A diagram illustrating the cycle of school improvement for
which the headteacher is responsible and the points of intended support
and challenge for the headteacher with the SIP..... - 29 -

Figure 2.1: A diagram to illustrate the continuum from professional
critic to professional friend..... - 52 -

Figure 2.2: A diagram to illustrate the accountability ‘pulls’ on the
secondary headteacher..... - 78 -

Table 2.3: A table to illustrate the interdependence of accountability
and autonomy..... - 85 -

Table 3.1: A table showing each section of the research study and why
the timing was pertinent..... - 121 -

Table 3.2: A table to show the percentage frequency distribution of the
length of time as a headteacher of those respondents to the
questionnaire who agreed to be interviewed..... - 129-

Figure 3.3: Skyrme’s Taxonomy of epistemology..... - 134 -

Table 3.4: A table to show how research questions and questions posed to participants are linked..... - 136 -

**Table 3.5: A table to show the link between ‘How it works’ and ‘How it feels’ with the questions posed in the semi-structured interviews
..... - 139 -**

Table 4.1: Distribution of responses to ranked importance of statements describing the purpose of SIPs (the most frequent in bold type)..... - 144 -

**Table 4.2: Distribution of responses about ways in which the LA supported and informed headteachers before the SIP implementation
..... - 145 -**

Table 4.3: Distribution by profile of SIPs deployed in Xshire..... - 146 -

Table 4.4: Distribution of expectations of the first meeting with the SIP..... - 147 -

Table 4.5: Distribution of responses to statements summarising perceptions and expectations of the SIP relationship (most frequent in bold type) - 148 -

Table 4.6: Distribution of headteacher interviewees’ responses to ranked importance of statements describing the purpose of SIPs
..... - 149 -

Table 4.7: Distribution of responses to ranked importance of statements describing the purpose of SIPs (the most frequent in bold type)..... - 156 -

Table 4.8: Distribution of responses about ways in which the LA supported and informed headteachers before the SIP implementation
..... - 157 -

Table 4.9: Profile of SIPs deployed to respondent’s schools by the LA
..... - 158 -

Table 4.10: Distribution of expectations of the first meeting with the SIP
..... - 159 -

Table 4.11: Distribution of responses to statements summarising perceptions and expectations of the SIP relationship (the most frequent in bold type) - 160 -

Table 4.12: Compares the ranking of the statements, in order of importance, from respondents in Xshire with all other respondents. (Percentage ranking in brackets) - 161 -

Table 4.13: A table linking comments from headteachers to Bottery’s hierarchy of trust..... - 205 -

Figure 5.1: A diagram to illustrate the continuum of meaning, from Gray *et al* (1985) - 212 -

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT

This study investigates English secondary headteachers' perception of the extent of their autonomy within accountability relationships. The study examines how headteachers have reconciled their autonomy with the accountability imposed on them by the School Improvement Partner (SIP) relationship. It focuses on the SIP relationship during the first two years of implementation. By exploring how the relationship works and how the headteacher feels, the study will consider to what extent it brings about a change in perceptions of partnership, autonomy and accountability. By analysing and interpreting the accounts given by headteachers the study will examine whether headteachers associate greater autonomy with increased accountability, and whether a partnership relationship is possible. Learning from others, where the role moves from critical friend and mentor to one with a power relationship, becomes problematic and this study explore how headteachers found ways to manage the accountability and their autonomy.

Secondary schools in the 21st century have delegated budgets, select their own staff, determine much of the curriculum, work as part of federations, and headteachers enjoy much more freedom than in other parts of the developed world (Lepkowska, 2006). With freedom and autonomy, there is a high level of accountability expressed principally through the inspection system and school performance tables, and also through the headteacher's relationship with the governing body which has statutory responsibility for the strategic direction of the school and monitoring its work. Much performance data is complex and contextualised and so for many schools, in reality governing bodies rely on the information given to them by the headteacher.

The proposal that each school should have a SIP was first detailed as being a "single conversation" (Miliband, 2004); where the SIP would moderate the school's self-evaluation, agree priorities for future improvement, agree targets, sign off the school improvement grant and identify external support. The idea was that headteachers would talk to just one school improvement consultant (the SIP) rather than meet with a number of professionals each bringing his or her own agenda. The relationship was described by Donovan (2005,p.3) as:

- Simplifying the school improvement agenda by removing the "clutter";

- Establishing a single conversation with schools, rather than expecting them to cope with a wide range of often unconnected initiatives;
- Helping schools to identify clearer priorities through sharper and more frequent inspections.

THE NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS – WHY IT WAS NEEDED

In 2004 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES,2004a) published *A New Relationship with Schools* (NRwS). The components of the NRwS include: the alignments of three year budgets, shorter and more frequent inspections, the introduction of the School Profile, the school's self-evaluation as the starting point for inspection, and challenge and support for school heads by accredited school improvement partners.

The aims of the NRwS (DfES 2005a,p.4) are stated as:

- To build the capacity of schools to improve, with rigorous self-evaluation, stronger collaboration and effective planning for improvement;
- To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform;
- To operate an intelligent accountability framework that is rigorous and has a lighter touch, giving schools, parents and pupils the information they need;

- To reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, making it easier for schools to engage the support they require without duplicative bidding, planning and reporting requirements;
- To improve data systems, to put the most useful data on pupils' progress into the hands of schools and those who work with them;
- To secure better alignment between schools' priorities and the priorities of local and central government.

Collaboration means 'working jointly' (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, p.196) and there is an immediate tension in this list. There is the suggestion that collaboration and self evaluation will help to increase capacity to improve and the NRwS will remove the 'duplicative bidding, planning and reporting requirements': in return there is more accountability from the increased use of data, more information for parents and the expectation of a greater alignment of individual school priorities with local and national ones.

The genesis of the NRwS is to be found in the demand for greater efficiency in the school inspection, the emergence of school self-evaluation and the growth of data about school performance, in a context of increased public accountability and greater autonomy for headteachers.

The demand for greater efficiency in the inspection system

The Education (Schools) Act (1992) established that all secondary schools in England should be inspected by Ofsted,¹ setting out the four areas covered by inspection: quality of education provided; educational standards achieved; leadership and management; social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Inspections were conducted by a large team (for an average secondary school at least fifteen inspectors would participate) who inspected the school for one week and published a lengthy report, using the Ofsted framework. All Ofsted reports are published on its website and schools are required to make the reports available to parents of children at the school.

The National Audit Office in 2004/05 reported that Ofsted's costs were £60m and following this, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2005,p.3) commented that

... as inspection continues to evolve ...we will continue to work with Ofsted on reducing the demands of inspection and increasing the value of its outputs, and the efficiency with which they are delivered.

¹ Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is the inspectorate for children and learners in England. It is a non-ministerial government department accountable to Parliament.

The NRwS brought about inspections lasting two days, conducted by two or three inspectors. The frequency of inspections has been increased with the maximum period between inspections reducing from six years to three years, more frequently for those causing concern. By shortening the duration and reducing the number of people involved in an inspection costs fall because demands are lessened and output is increased.

The emergence of school self-evaluation

On their own, these changes may have impacted on the value of the inspection outputs and to avoid this, a new focus on self-evaluation seemed to offer a solution (DfES 2005a,p.4). The roots are found in the 1997 Ofsted Annual Report where it was noted by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) specifically that:

Too many headteachers do not really know what is happening in the classrooms of their schools. They do not know because they do not have a rigorous and systematic approach to monitoring standards and evaluating the quality of teaching. This is a fundamental weakness..... A minority of schools have... had the courage to cut through the obstacles to an honest identification of the really important issues. Too many have not.

Commentary (on-line version)

Ofsted (2000) subsequently commented on the quality of self-evaluation:

... Monitoring and evaluation are also weak in about one-quarter of schools. Schools with effective procedures in place know how well they are doing and what needs to be improved further.

Para 104 (on-line version)

Four years later at a Press Conference, HMCI David Bell (2004) stated:

School self-evaluation has improved in recent years, although it remains an aspect of school management where improvement is still needed.

Transcript of Press Conference (on-line version)

The following year Bell (2005) gave his analysis of the impact of Ofsted on self-evaluation and school improvement:

The third area, then, in which I believe Ofsted has been particularly influential, has been in promoting self-evaluation. The profile of self-evaluation has never been higher and the quality of self-evaluation is improving year on year... Publishing the criteria for evaluating standards and quality was a landmark decision, welcomed by schools...Schools had, for the first time, explicit criteria against which they could measure their own performance.

Commentary by HMCI (on-line version)

Self-evaluation has moved from something that schools did of their own volition to part of the headteacher's job. Headteachers are responsible for producing the Self Evaluation Form (SEF) as part of the NRwS. The SEF is a document that is posted by schools on the Ofsted website and includes the following sections: characteristics of the school, views of learners, parents/carers and other stakeholders, achievement and standards, personal development and well being, quality of provision, leadership and management, and overall effectiveness. Although the SEF is non statutory, headteachers are expected to produce one annually; if they do not do so they have to provide evidence of self-evaluation (Ofsted 2007); no evidence of self-evaluation will normally result in a poor inspection outcome.

The new Ofsted framework for inspection includes those areas set out in the 1996 Act and additionally, has to report on the five outcomes for children and young people set out in *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003).

The publication of the Ofsted framework makes clear the government's perceived role in school improvement. Macbeath (2006,p.2) describes school self-evaluation as the means by which schools 'speak for themselves, determine what is important, what should be measured and how their story should be told', but government clearly considers that it holds the key to school improvement and that, by making all schools comply with its model, it will be effective.

The growth of data about school performance

As part of the NRwS, the DfES reviewed the data that it collects and the analysis it provides. The principal source of data is RAISEonline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self-Evaluation), produced by Ofsted. According to its website, Ofsted aims to:

- Enable schools to analyse performance data in greater depth as part of the self-evaluation process,
- Provide a common set of analyses for schools, Local Authorities, inspectors and School Improvement Partners,
- Better support teaching and learning.

It provides schools with reports and analysis covering the attainment and progress of its pupils and contextual information about the school, including comparisons with other schools. The model for CVA (contextualised value added) is based on factors including percentage of children taking free school meals, special educational needs of the pupils, gender balance, mobility, socio-economic factors, prior attainment, national progress, and ethnicity. The ability of an individual school to judge itself is affected because it is very difficult for an individual institution to replicate this model. All schools have access to this information; Ofsted uses RAISEonline when forming its hypotheses as part of the inspection process. Data has moved from something owned and controlled by schools to being externally managed and presented to

schools. This process is helpful to schools in that there is a consistent data stream that is applicable to all but reinforces the centralist role in school improvement that the government has assumed through the inspection system and its control over data. It defines through its activity that school improvement is measured by the performance data of the students, principally in terms of 5 A*-C GCSE statistics.

THE NRwS— THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

According to the policy documents, the NRwS is designed to increase public accountability through the School Profile, more frequent inspections and the ‘single conversation’ with the SIP, a Local Authority (LA) agent. To counter this increase in accountability, schools were told that self-evaluation would be the starting point for inspection, have more predictable funding and:

external challenge and support for school heads from high-quality, professional, nationally accredited School Improvement Partners, most of whom will be experienced heads

DfES (2005a,p.6)

A key dimension of the NRwS is accountability, where the SIP works with the school, then reports to the LA which tasks the SIP in subsequent dialogues with the school.

Schools at the DfES wrote to all LAs stating that 'no school standards

This is illustrated in a slide reproduced from a National Strategies (NS) briefing². The advent of the SIP is causing a change to relationships

The National Strategies



SIPs working with schools

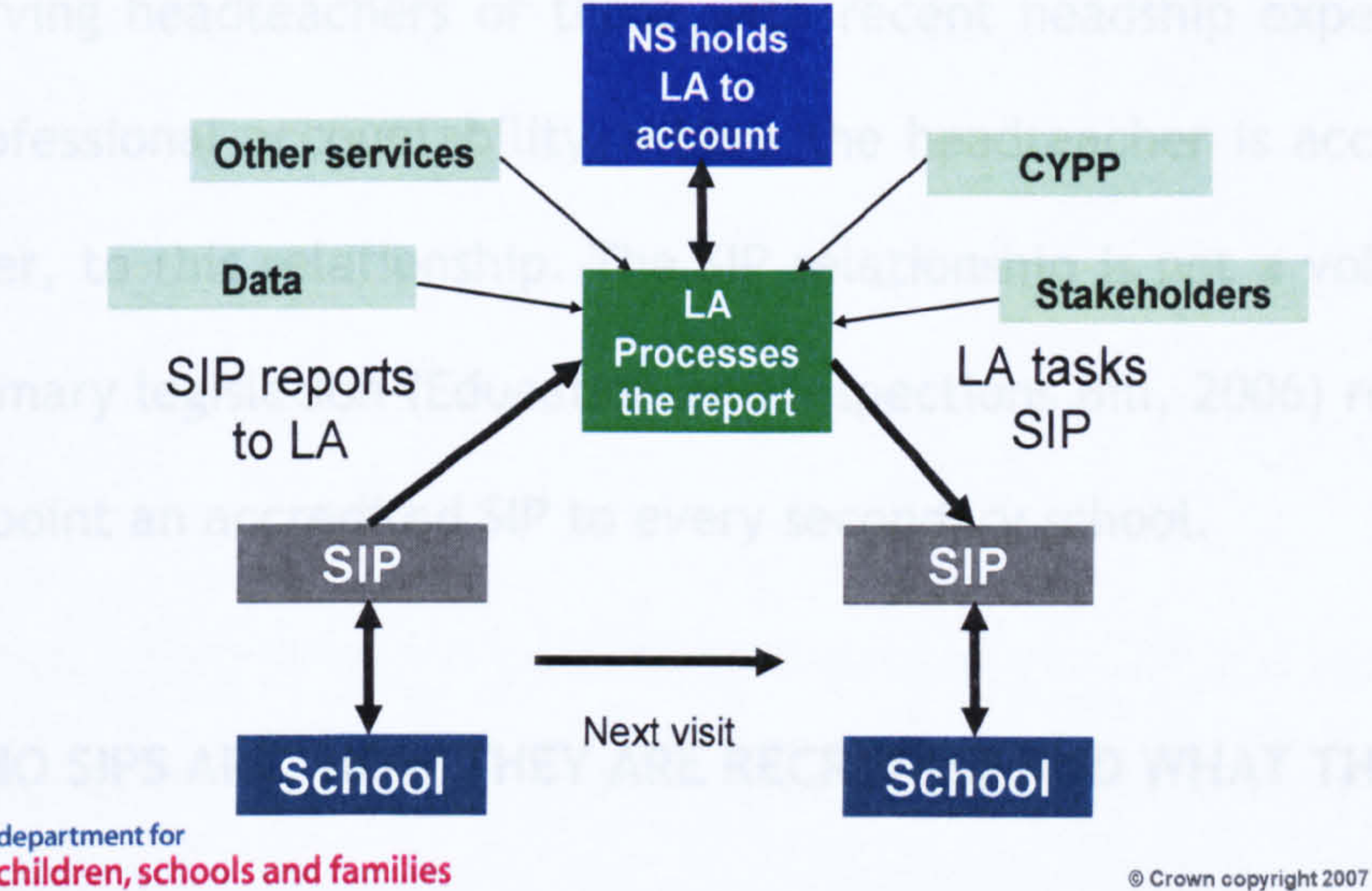


Figure 1.1 A diagram illustrating the relationship between the SIP, School, LA, NS, and other stakeholders.

In the NRwS, the SIP acts for the LA and is meant to be the conduit for LA communication about school improvement with the school. Whilst the data produced by RAISEonline suggests school improvement is defined through pupil performance data, for a LA it is defined in terms of *Every Child Matters (ECM)*. In October 2006, the then Director General for

² The presentation ‘School Improvement Programme Plan’ was supplied by National Strategies on request and reproduced with the permission of the Director of School Improvement for National Strategies. CYPP is the Children and Young People’s Plan

Schools at the DfES wrote to all LAs stating that ‘no school standards without Every Child Matters and no ECM without school standards’ (DfES,2006c).The advent of the SIP is causing a change to relationships between local authorities and schools if only because the SIP is the LA’s agent. The intention of the NRwS is that the majority of SIPs should be serving headteachers or those with recent headship experience adding professional accountability, where the headteacher is accountable to a peer, to this relationship. The SIP relationship is not a voluntary one as primary legislation (Education and Inspections Bill, 2006) requires LAs to appoint an accredited SIP to every secondary school.

WHO SIPS ARE, HOW THEY ARE RECRUITED AND WHAT THEY DO

The NRwS was designed according to DfES (2006a,p.3) ‘to give schools greater freedom and autonomy and thereby release greater local initiative and energy in schools, helping them to raise standards’. This new relationship included the SIP programme with the aim to:

provide school leaders with the challenge and support from people who really know the business of school improvement and the realities of school leadership

The SIP Job Description (DfES,2006a,p.19) describes the purpose of a SIP to:

- provide(s) professional challenge and support to a number of schools maintained by one or more authorities by:
- act(ing) as a critical professional friend...
- help(ing) to build the school's capacity to improve pupils' achievements...;
- provide(ing) challenge and support to the senior leadership team in the schools; and
- provide(ing) information to governing bodies on their schools' performance and development.

School improvement is defined implicitly in this list and in the context of headteacher autonomy, the government introduced a new relationship that is described as a 'partnership' with a focus on improvement. The list raises questions about the nature of partnership and possible role conflict. While SIPs are 'professional critical friends' who agree statutory targets and provide performance information to the governing body, they are however themselves accountable to the LA, as the employer. Is trust possible in this relationship, and how will headteachers reconcile their autonomy with this new accountability?

SIPs were introduced as a first wave in September 2005, the second wave began in April 2006 and the remaining ninety four LAs accounting for nearly 2000 schools implemented the SIP programme in September

2006. By September 2006, therefore, all secondary schools in England had a SIP.

The contract for the recruitment and accreditation of SIPs was awarded to the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). The recruitment process includes two professional referees. In the case of secondary headteachers, the two referees have to be a representative of the LA and the chair of governors. Applicants then complete an on-line assessment which involves answering a series of questions using the data on a fictitious school. Applicants passing this test are invited to attend a two day training and assessment course. An accredited SIP is contracted to spend five days per year working with each of their partner schools and there is an expectation that each SIP will take on three schools. Additional time is provided for professional development and meetings with their LA employers.

The SIP brief is to produce written reports that provide the headteacher, governors and LA with a clear view of:

- the strengths of the school;
- the quality of the school's self-evaluation;
- the priorities for school improvement....

National Strategies (2007,p.4)

WHY I AM INTERESTED IN HEADTEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SIPS

The question I have been asking of myself is “what is my job as a secondary headteacher?” As a mathematician with some expertise in data analysis my skill has been constructing school improvement strategy through targeted intervention.

For me, and anecdotally from other secondary headteachers, there has been a credibility issue in discussions with LA advisers in that very few have headteacher experience. Performance reviews have been carried out by a committee drawn from the governing body with advice from a chosen external adviser; now the SIP is the external adviser at the performance review of the headteacher. Personally this creates a problem - on the one hand I am to work in partnership with the SIP and yet, this person will report to the LA on my work and is the adviser to the governors for my performance review. Will I be able to trust this person? As part of a publicly funded education system, I have seen my role as largely autonomous but publicly accountable; highly self reliant but dependent on the work of *my* team at *my* school.

THE HEADTEACHER'S JOB

According the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES,2004b,p.4)

The headteacher is the leading professional in the school. Accountable to the governing body, the headteacher provides vision, leadership and direction for the school and ensures that it is managed and organised to meet its aims and targets. The headteacher, working with others, is responsible for evaluating the school's performance to identify the priorities for continuous improvement and raising standards... and for the day-to-day management, organisation and administration of the school.

This list of tasks fits the five stage cycle of school improvement model found in DfES (1997,p.7):

- school evaluation ('how well are we doing and how well should we be doing');
- identification of priorities ('what more can we aim to achieve');
- planning ('what must we do to make it happen'); and,
- monitoring the work of the school ('takes action, reviews success, and starts the cycle again').

Harris (2002) critiques any paradigm of school improvement that is predicated on management models (drawing on Hopkins *et al*,1997) in that it rarely impacts on student achievement or learning (drawing on Fullan, 1991,p.2). However this school improvement model is found in

many DCSF³ publications and links well with the stated focus for the SIP namely (DfES,2006a):

- How well is the school performing?
- What are the key factors?
- What are the key priorities and targets for improvement?
- How will the school achieve them?

The interplay between these elements of school improvement (which the headteacher is responsible and accountable for) and the relationship with the governing body, with the SIP intervening at the key points, is illustrated in the diagram below (*the dark blue double arrows represent the partnership relationship between the SIP and headteacher, the pale blue arrows represent the cycle of school improvement and the single headed red arrows represent an accountability relationship between the headteacher and the Governors*):

³ The DCSF was created on 28 June 2007 following the demerger of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

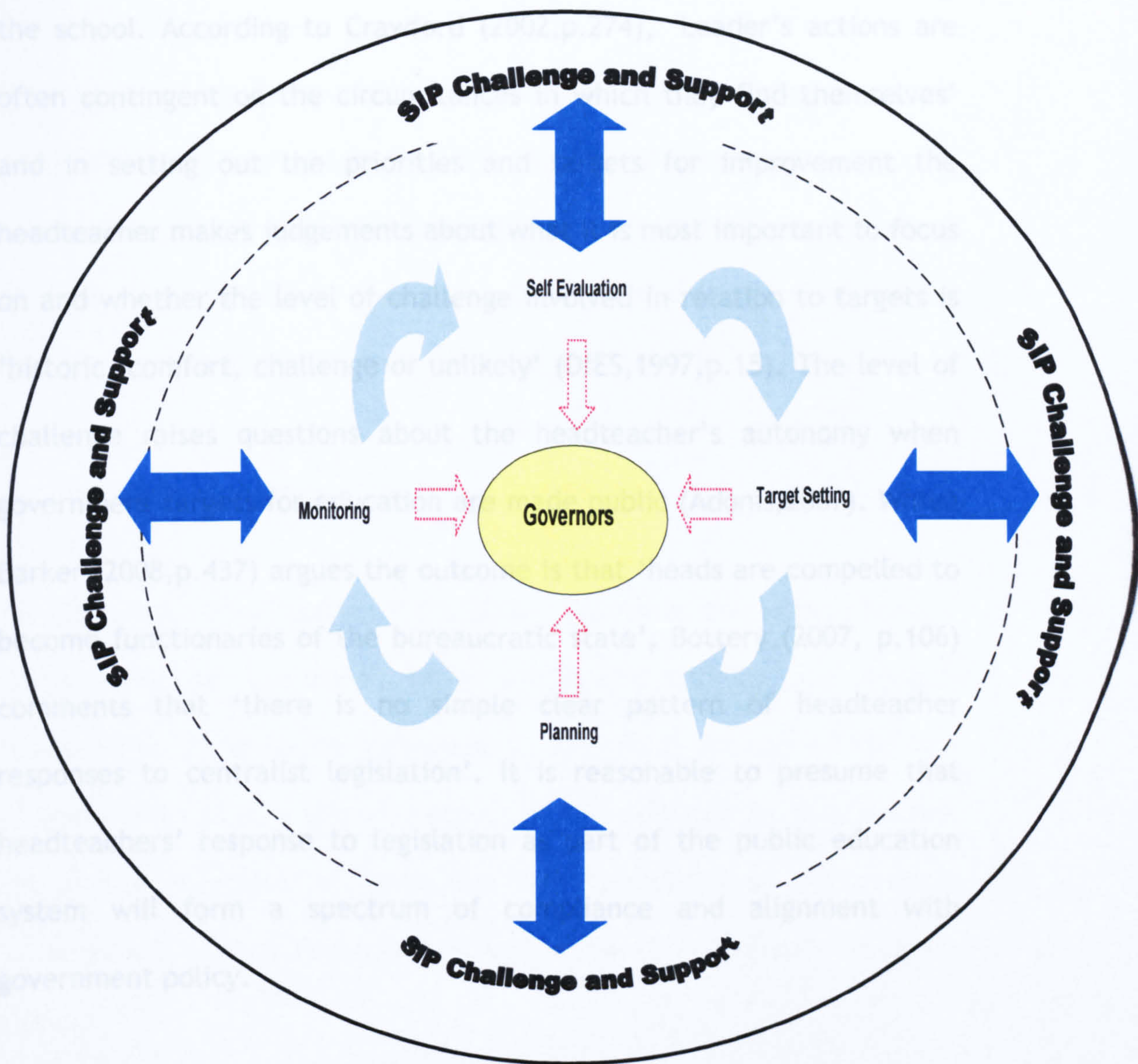


Figure 1.2 A diagram illustrating the cycle of school improvement for which the headteacher is responsible and the points of intended support and challenge for the headteacher with the SIP.

The SIP relationship is one of accountability where the headteacher is held to account throughout the school improvement planning cycle, and this is manifested in the activities of the SIP focus. The list given earlier (DfES, 2006a) raises questions about the headteacher's ability to use information and data about the school and his or her knowledge of

the school. According to Crawford (2002,p.274), ‘Leader’s actions are often contingent on the circumstances in which they find themselves’ and in setting out the priorities and targets for improvement the headteacher makes judgements about what it is most important to focus on and whether the level of challenge involved in relation to targets is ‘historic, comfort, challenge or unlikely’ (DfES,1997,p.15). The level of challenge raises questions about the headteacher’s autonomy when government targets for education are made public (Adonis,2007). Whilst Barker (2008,p.437) argues the outcome is that ‘heads are compelled to become functionaries of the bureaucratic state’, Bottery (2007, p.106) comments that ‘there is no simple clear pattern of headteacher responses to centralist legislation’. It is reasonable to presume that headteachers’ response to legislation as part of the public education system will form a spectrum of compliance and alignment with government policy.

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SIPS ON THE CYCLE OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The outcome of government policy has been to increase headteachers’ autonomy. Using self-evaluation as the starting point for an inspection enables the school to ‘have its say’ and to contextualize the school’s performance— there is however, an inherent tension in the school’s version of its performance and the demands of public accountability expressed principally through the inspection system.

We might anticipate the SIP's focus to be school improvement, in particular the four elements of self-evaluation, target setting, planning and monitoring. If the SIP relationship causes the perception of an increase in accountability then this will be evident in the testimony of headteachers as they work on these areas with their SIP.

MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The SIP person specification (DfES,2006a) identifies two areas of focus; firstly, school self-evaluation, target setting and planning, and secondly headteacher performance management. This study focuses on the first of these roles as it is the only aspect of the relationship that is solely about the headteacher and the SIP. Headteacher performance management involves governors, as well as the SIP— it requires separate study.

The main question being asked is how headteachers have reconciled their autonomy with the accountability imposed on them by the SIP relationship. In order to answer this question, the study will explore the relationship between the headteacher and the SIP through the following research questions:

Key Research Questions (KRQ)

KRQ1 What expectations do headteachers have about the relationship with their SIP?

KRQ2 How do headteachers describe the relationship with their SIP during the first two years of implementation?

KRQ3 What do headteacher accounts tell us about their perceptions of partnership?

KRQ4 What do headteacher accounts tell us about their perceptions of autonomy?

KRQ5 What do headteacher accounts tell us about their perceptions of accountability?

The first two questions will be answered directly through field research and the interpretive approach applied to the remaining three. The study will be concluded by looking at the themes that emerge from the data gathered and interpreted in response to research questions.

THE APPROACH TO THIS STUDY

Headteachers have numerous accountabilities; introducing the SIP creates contradictions for headteachers. To what extent should they trust their SIP and can they trust their SIP? As the leading professional responsible for school improvement, it is perhaps unsurprising that the partner is for 'school improvement'. However, perceptions of this relationship will rely on a shared understanding of what it means to

improve and the possible impact of the SIP on school improvement. By exploring perceptions we can assess whether it is possible to be a 'professional critical friend' whilst being employed by the LA. This study is about perceptions of headteachers; reference is made to school performance data but no analysis is included.

The data generated is analysed and interpreted to provide answers to the key research questions. The approach I take is similar to that of a situational ethnomethodologist who examines documents rather than treats them as a resource; actively solicits accounts from participants and seeks to understand the ways in which people (in this case secondary headteachers) negotiate the social context of their professional life. The risk associated with the interpretive tradition is for me found in my professional work both as a secondary headteacher and as a practising SIP. How it works and how it feels for me are experiences that will shape my presentation of this study. The context is one where the policy develops over the period of implementation.

HOW THIS STUDY IS STRUCTURED

This study continues with a literature review where the themes of school improvement, partnership, autonomy and accountability are each explored. The chapter brings together the early literature on SIPs with some pointers to how the issues might affect a headteacher's perceptions and expectations. Chapter 3 describes the choices that were

made on research methodology. Data has been gathered from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In this study I interviewed a group of headteachers over the course of the first two years of working with the SIP. This leads to chapter 4 where the data is analysed and the 'story' emerging from the headteachers is told. Finally chapter 5 draws together the evidence and offers conclusions to this study.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

‘It’s no legend’, said the landlady, ‘it’s much rather the result of general experience’.

‘I see, a thing then to be refuted by further experience’, said K.

Kafka, *The Castle*, p.86

INTRODUCTION

SIPs are deployed to schools as part of the NRwS and are selected because they ‘really know the business of school improvement’ (DfES,2006a,p.3) and ‘most ...will be experienced heads’ (DfES,2005a,p.6). Their expertise comes from their experience as serving headteachers. In the above quotation, K draws attention to the obvious fallibility of advice based solely on experience, and reminds us of the complexity of the relationship between process, context and outcome.

In 1992, the Conservative government restated and developed its approach to raising standards via the opting out route⁴, described by Shabha and Orr (1996,p.54) as ‘the move towards independent

⁴ The Education Reform Act 1988 provided schools with the means to ‘opt out’ of LA control. Such schools were called grant maintained as they received their funding directly by grant from the DfES.

management of schools'. According to Anderson and Bush (1999), whilst the government remained vague as to what 'standards' it had in mind, it was clear, 'that autonomous status for schools was a necessary condition for their improvement'(p.18). Anderson and Bush link accountability and standards by arguing that the former requires schools to be answerable in particular ways for their work as 'talk about standards makes no sense in the absence of some forms of public accountability'(p.19). After a decade of Labour government, Harris (2008) comments that in virtually every industrialised democracy 'the idea of accountability for performance has a firm grip on education policy' (p.19). The diagram in chapter 1 illustrates the accountability relationship between the headteacher and the governing body; the headteacher's role in a school is pervasive, holding and exerting considerable power and influence over operations. In this context, the government introduced a new relationship expressed as a partnership. The key contact for the SIP is the headteacher and the deployment of SIPs represents a new accountability relationship. Headteachers have to manage this new relationship as well as other ones. Starting from the policy documents explored in chapter 1, we can see how this new relationship has introduced contradictions and possible difficulties for headteachers. How headteachers perceive this relationship will be affected by how confident they feel in their role, their experience of working with others (for example LA officers), their understanding of school improvement, and to what extent this new relationship is a challenge, a threat or otherwise, to their own view of headteacher

autonomy and accountability, or an embodiment of partnership. Their perceptions and their feelings matter because:

the notion that individuals perceive and interpret their accountabilities subjectively is critical to understanding why multiple employees can behave differently (and sometimes unethically) under the same accountability conditions

Hall *et al*,2007,p.412

In this context, we might say that all secondary headteachers are each employed by a LA and in that sense can be thought of as ‘multiple employees’⁵. As they operate at the statutory level, under the same accountability conditions, their perception matters because it will affect the developing SIP relationship.

Like all relationships, each person’s understanding and perception of its purpose will impact on its success or otherwise. Accountability has become, like autonomy, a necessary condition for school improvement and partnership is proposed as the means by which the government will bring these together. According to Crawford (2009,p.5) ‘the English school leader is held very accountable for the success or failure of their school’. Accountability can be felt as a ‘very personal responsibility’ (Crawford,2009,p.5) and how headteachers feel is an important part of

⁵ There are four types of maintained secondary schools: Community, Voluntary Controlled, Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools.

leadership. Any increase in accountability will therefore, affect headteachers.

This literature review is divided into three sections. Firstly, school improvement, partnership, autonomy and accountability, are explored in general terms and then linked to what we know about school improvement. Secondly, I consider the role of the headteacher in school improvement and the questions raised by the introduction of a new relationship. Finally, there is very little published research on the NRwS but early studies and peer discussions are brought together with how headteachers might respond given what we know about autonomy, accountability and relationship management.

WHAT IS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT?

School improvement is a key role for the headteacher and is also the stated purpose of the SIP, defined in terms of student achievement. Although this study is not about school improvement *per se*, it is pertinent because it forms the subject of the work that the headteacher and SIP will do and is in the title of the job, 'school improvement partner'.

What does it mean to improve?

Stoll and Fink (1996) describe school improvement as a process where the outcome is effectiveness. An effective school has been described as 'one in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake' (Mortimore,1991,p.9) and one which 'adds extra value to its students in comparison with other schools serving similar intakes' (Sammons *et al*,1995,p.3).

An attempt at interpolation to define what school improvement is presumes the 'input-process-output' model as the 'dominant paradigm of organisation' (Bentley and Wilsdon,2003,p.22), yet discussions on causality (for example Hage and Meeker, 1988) guard us against any such attempt because 'ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals are also different at different points' (p.77). This view is supported by Clark (2005) who argues that in the search for what '*causes* people to be educated' (his italics (p.289)) we say that there are methods, techniques and strategies that work, yet we only know *post hoc* that these have led to a desired result. In the nomological sense we do not know that they will work in the future, because the necessary conditions may be absent.

The dictionary definition of success is 'the thing that turns out well' (Concise Oxford Dictionary,p.1152) yet MacGilchrist *et al*(1997) describe the difficulty in trying to judge success by reminding us of the distinction

between how children *progress* and the *outcomes* of learning (p.1, their italics).

School improvement— the statistical approach

Hargreaves (2003) contributes to this discussion by making a distinction between success and failure in raw achievement scores. The past two decades have seen increasingly politicised education debate that has included the publication of school performance data (in league tables) and Ofsted reports. School improvement has also become big commercial business with companies such as Capita plc reporting that 11% of its £2441m turnover is for education services (Capita, 2008) and Serco plc (Serco, 2008) stating 36% of its £3124m revenue being for ‘Civil Government’ services that include education and the running of two LAs.

Much of the literature focuses on either ‘School effectiveness: the nouns and adjectives of successful schooling’ (Brighouse and Woods (1999,p.9) or ‘School improvement: the verbs of successful schooling’ (Brighouse and Woods,1999,p.11). This distinction reminds us that the former is about outcomes (i.e. what a school is when it is ‘successful’) and the latter concerns activity (i.e. what it needs to do to become ‘successful’). The ideas on school improvement are about planning, achievement, measuring success, activity, progress, attainment and self-evaluation.

One way of bringing these ideas together is to consider Hopkins' (2001) definition of school improvement which suggests that it has two elements. It is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions that support it and it is about improving the school's capacity for providing quality education in times of change.

A number of issues follow. Firstly, what does it mean to raise achievement? We need to know what to measure and how (Schagen 1991). Gray *et al*(1990) commented critically on the statistically dubious judgements that were being made about schools. If we use the outputs as a means of establishing success then different value added measures give conflicting messages about a school's effectiveness (Mansell,2006). Sammons (1996) argues that effectiveness is a relative, retrospective concept that is both outcome and time dependent and suggests that clear distinctions can only be drawn between schools with significantly poorer or significantly better results than those predicted on the basis of students' prior attainments and other significant intake measures. Sammons and Luyten draw attention to the 'adequacy of intake control...especially in terms of prior attainment measures that are good predictors of later attainment.' (2009,p.136)

Secondly, Hopkins reminds us that the work of schools is about provision and improving capacity for providing quality education in times of change. Education, as part of a public service, has the principles of

‘universal provision with personalised delivery, high standards flexibly delivered and equity and choice’ (Miliband,2005,p.4).The commitment made by the Labour government to these principles of public service means that the education system has to operate in both a public world as well as its closed professional one. Secondary headteachers are significant players in the education world and their accountability leads them very much into the public world as well.

The argument is that the school changes because the school adapts; the school that is improving is active in that it is the organisation that determines and provides for itself. Chapman (2003) argues that a system is adaptive when it has some way of coordinating its behaviour or responses in such a way as to protect some core structure or values. His contention is that organisations will behave in ways that resist attempts to make them change. At this point we note that providing support and challenge to headteachers is the SIP role and therefore headteachers will respond to attempts to make them change.

Thirdly, what do we mean by a ‘quality education’. This is an important point because in seeking to explore links between school improvement and the purpose of the SIP we need to bear in mind that for Ofsted (2005,p.4), an Outstandingly Effective school is one that where:

Standards and achievement and personal development are outstanding. Learners make very good progress consistently and excellent progress in many areas of their work.

The DfES (2004c, paragraph 9) stated that whilst there was no single definition of what constitutes a successful and popular school the factors included performance, applications for places and absolute results i.e. those achieved in public examinations.

School improvement— the case study approach

Brighouse and Woods assert that we have gained greater and ever more precise insight into the characteristics of school success through the use of the case study. Much school improvement literature includes case study but Levin (2006) warns us that research based on case studies tends to support an ‘each school has its own story’ approach (p.400) and we need to separate what is specific to a setting and what is most relevant to other schools. Barker (2007) discusses the search for the ‘missing link between school leadership and results’ (p.26) and validates his use of case study ‘as a case where the characteristics described in the literature were most likely to be found’ (p.26). Given that SIPs are ‘people who really know the business of school improvement’ (DfES,2006a,p.3) and the majority are intended to be serving heads, the reference point for shared notions of improvement and success is important as is the means by which SIPs develop their understanding.

What is the link between improvement and effectiveness?

There is a debate about school improvement and school effectiveness—what conditions support improvement, how we measure effectiveness and moreover, whether it is possible to create theory and knowledge about school improvement. If the issues are about success, then if theory cannot be ‘inferred from empirical evidence’ (Popper,1963,p.54), is school improvement about what we do or what we observe being done or is it the ‘journey to success and the necessary conditions to support successful change’? (Macbeath and Mortimore,2001: Stoll and Wikeley,1998).

Luyten *et al*(2009) comment that when we discuss school effectiveness we are essentially looking at ‘school effects’ but that these ‘merely relate to a school’s relative position in comparison to other schools (p.160); Kyriakides and Luyten (2009) comment further that ‘schooling constitutes one important aspect of the environment of the child...however, measuring the contribution ...is a very difficult task’ (p.168). The SIP’s purpose (DfES,2006a,p.19) is ‘to help to build the school’s capacity to improve pupil’s achievements’ but will the SIP have sufficient skill and knowledge to be able to challenge the school’s planning and self-evaluation processes? Further, to what extent will this be based on a shared understanding of school improvement, the advice

from the DCSF and others, or will they instead draw on the templates or recipes that they have developed through their own experiences?

Thrupp (2005), when discussing the National Standards for Headteachers(TTA,1998), warns that heads become necessarily concerned with accreditation and this is expressed in conformity rather than by an interrogation of the values of what they are being taught. Therefore the extent to which SIPs are able to exercise professional judgement whilst being both serving headteachers (and of course, have their own SIP) and agents of the LA raises issues of role conflict that may affect the relationship with the headteacher.

How does self-evaluation contribute to school improvement?

Self-evaluation is listed in many of the factors for school improvement (Brighouse and Woods 1999, Mortimore *et al*,1998 cited in Riddell *et al*(1998)) and is fundamental to the NRwS as the starting point, along with RAISEonline performance data for school inspection and one of the areas for challenge to the headteacher by the SIP. Schools receive two days notice of an inspection and the inspection team form their hypotheses on the basis of the SEF and RAISEonline data: an unclear or misrepresentative SEF will often result in an inadequate judgement on the school's capacity to improve. Such a judgement will often result in a

school being given a notice to improve⁶. Ofsted will judge that a SEF misrepresents a situation if it does not make use of externally produced data analysis.

Although there is no legal requirement for a school to have either an improvement plan or a SEF, the advice to governors in the *Guide to the Law* (2008, chapter 11,p.104) is:

It is expected that at least once a year the governing body would want to see and agree the SEF. The school plan should be monitored, evaluated, reviewed and adjusted as appropriate as part of the ongoing cycle of self-evaluation.

The DfES advice (DfES,2005b) is that schools should ‘draw on processes you already have (in your school) to complete your SEF’ and according to TeacherNet, the DCSF’s website to support the teaching profession, self-evaluation models for schools should:

- Provide a clear and unbureaucratic framework for self-review

⁶ The notice to improve includes being placed in special measures. Schools require special measures when they are failing to give learners an acceptable standard of education, and when the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement. This is a serious judgment on a school and it is subject to close scrutiny and termly visits from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Schools.

- Place pupil progress and attainment at the heart of self-evaluation
- Lead to a rigorous and objective diagnosis of need
- Lead to effective action planning to build on a school's strengths and remedy existing weaknesses.

Riddell *et al*(1998) are concerned that whilst school self-evaluation may be a helpful means of moving a school forward, that there are dangers that bad practice is reproduced uncritically and Stoll and Fink (1996,p.134) argue:

Schools need critical friends, individuals, groups who, at appropriate times, listen and help them to sort out their thinking and make sound decisions, who are not afraid to tell them when expectations for themselves and others are too low and when their actions do not match their intentions.

Self-evaluation should be an internally driven process but is also a means to categorise schools and this process contributes to headteacher accountability. Dunford (2006a) describes the two elements thus:

Self-evaluation is an internal management process. The SEF is an external accountability device.

This is significant because Dunford's message is that self-evaluation as a process is positive because it supports the work of the headteacher but the word 'device' has a pejorative tone suggesting a level of manipulation and control.

There is no shortage of advice on what to do as the subject matter of school improvement activity has become a 'global industry' (Hamilton,1998) despite Von Hippel's (2009) analysis that 'a school's achievement level is strongly influenced by contextual or intake variables that are beyond the school's control' (p.186). Clarke (2000) argues that as schools continue to improve 'they will eventually come to a point where they need to communicate and examine what other schools are doing' (in Stoll *et al*,2001,p.203). Activity alone will not in itself be self-justifying; it needs some form of review and evaluation to assess its efficacy. The SIP, as part of the NRwS, is tasked to offer challenge and support to support school's self-evaluation as a 'partner' and it is to this element of the relationship we turn.

WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP?

The dictionary definition of a partner is of 'a sharer', 'a person associated with others in business of which he shares risks and profits' and 'a player associated with another in game and scoring jointly with him' (Concise Oxford Dictionary,p.84). These definitions suggest a relationship in which the parties enjoy or endure jointly and as partners

enjoy and suffer together. When things go well, they both enjoy the success, and if things go wrong both will suffer.

Themes in partnership

The concept of a partner is one that is open to interpretation; if the basis of a partnership is a contract that states what you can and cannot do, then it relies on the parties to think of all that they might want or need to do. If the partnership is formed by the bringing together of a number of bodies (in the literal or even the semiotic sense) then the superordinate has to think of all that the relationship needs. The NRwS describes the SIP as the ‘critical professional friend’ and this is the starting point for the discussion. Swaffield and MacBeath (2005) discuss the role of the critical friend in relation to self-evaluation, raising questions of a critical friend’s purpose, focus and boundaries. Whilst their discussion centres on the two approaches to school evaluation— the internal and external— their framework will be used to explore the way in which the SIP relationship can be described and some of the controls that headteachers might apply in order to create boundaries in the relationship— and indeed why they might choose to do so.

However, if a partnership is one that is ‘a shared set of beliefs and behaviours’ (Empson,2006,p.148) then this provides a useful framework in which to discuss the way in which headteachers might approach the management of the SIP relationship. Headteachers and SIP jointly and

severally may make assumptions about beliefs and values, and expect one another to behave in the same way. The extent to which this occurs will be found in the approach taken by the headteacher to the first and subsequent meetings with the SIP and how they describe the emerging relationship.

The partner as the critical professional friend

The NRwS describes the SIP as the ‘critical professional friend’ and other terms can be found to describe similar relationships such as adviser, coach or mentor. Using these terms interchangeably is problematic if only because the term ‘mentor’ has been used to describe relationships between teachers and their students, by life-coaches and their clients. Hobson and Sharp (2005) define a mentor as the ‘wise and trusted guide’ before going on to make a distinction between the informal (a colleague who might provide advice, opinions or support) and the formal (where people are specifically designated to perform this work). The use of the term mentor does acknowledge the ‘personal and professional tensions facing those in leadership positions’ (Harris,2006,p.417).

Swaffield (2002) starts her discussion of the critical friend, referring to the definition offered by Costa and Kallick (1993), by exploring the two words separately– the idea of the critic and the role of the friend. She draws on Watling *et al*(1998) in talking of a continuum from ‘total friend’ to ‘total critic’. The phrase in the NRwS documents is that of

‘critical professional friend’ and the insertion of the word ‘professional’ introduces the concept of the continuum ‘total professional friend’ to ‘total professional critic’. The latter is found in art and media: author and literary critic Shriver (2007) described the process of reviewing another person’s novel when poised to receive a review of her own as like ‘throwing knives in a rubber room’; and of course, some serving headteachers are SIPs and therefore the *person* is relevant in the relationship.

Being critical - phrased as ‘the exercise of professional judgement’ (Goodson and Hargreaves,1996) and being criticised - phrased as ‘reflective practice’ (Schön,1983) and ‘embodied judgment making’ (Beckett and Hager,2002)— is summarised neatly by Stronach *et al*(2002) who argue that being a professional critic is synonymous with exercising a professional judgement. The medical profession has a long history of providing mentors to doctors and the Medical Research Council (MRC) describes a mentor as ‘...not a supervisor/sponsor, but a ‘wise and trusted professional friend’ – typically a senior figure from outside the host department with whom to discuss career aims, problems and development’(MRC,2007). Page and McCandlish (2006) talk of the relationship between birthing mothers and midwives as being ‘more of a friend relationship, but a friend you could trust in - a professional friend you could rely on’ and that being a midwife ‘requires not only good clinical skills but also a broad understanding of the social and emotional changes a woman goes through before and after birth’.

The skills of critique and friendship recur. Costa and Kallick (1993,p.50)

The continuum for the professional critic and professional friend runs from one who exercises professional judgement to one who has that broad understanding of the person experiencing the role and can discuss problems and development. The need for emotional, intellectual and practical support is emphasised by Thomson (2006) who draws on Gardiner (2003) when describing the one-to-one relationship that is reflective for both parties but speaks of the need to establish boundaries, particularly in relation to confidentiality and to prevent gossip or pseudo-therapy.

The relationship can be illustrated thus:

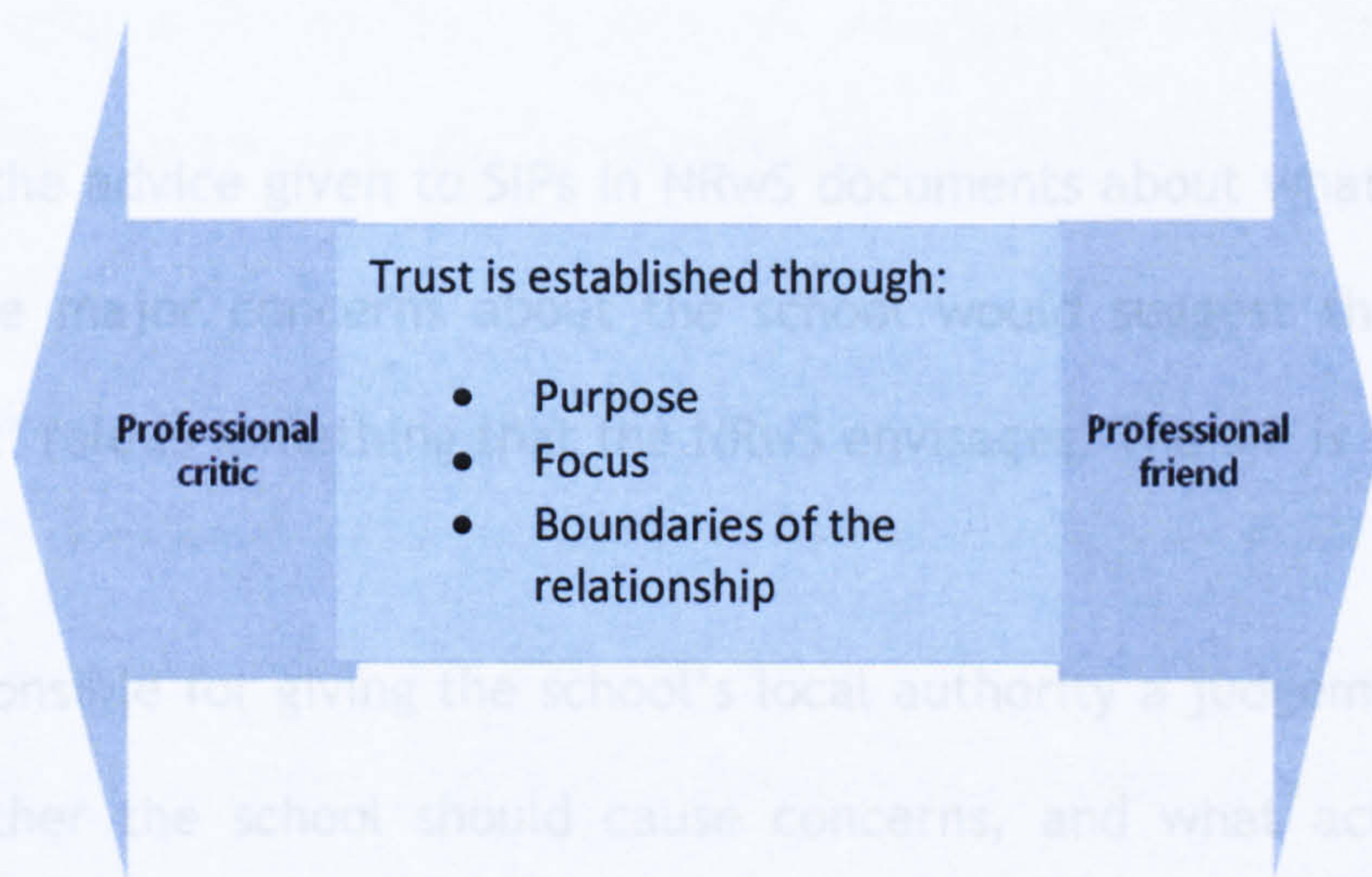


Figure 2.1 A diagram to illustrate the continuum from professional critic to professional friend.

The skills of critique and friendship recur. Costa and Kallick (1993,p.50) draw attention to the view that many people equate critique with judgement, because the concept of critique carries negative baggage; therefore a critical friendship must begin by building trust and the person or group needs to feel that the friend will:

- be clear about the nature of the relationship, and not use it for evaluation or judgement;
- listen well: clarifying ideas, encouraging specificity, and taking time to fully understand what is being presented;
- offer value judgements only on request from the learner;
- respond to the learner's work with integrity; and
- be an advocate for the success of the work.

Certainly, the advice given to SIPs in NRwS documents about what to do if there are major concerns about the school would suggest that the 'total critic' role is something that the NRwS envisages. The SIP is

responsible for giving the school's local authority a judgement on whether the school should cause concerns, and what action is needed....where the school improvement partner's advice is that the school's own actions will not enable it to improve...this advice may prompt the authority to intervene

DfES,2006a,p.11

A robust system should have provision for extreme situations (i.e. the case of a failing school) but Costa and Kallick's view of the critical friend raises questions of trust.

Role of trust in a partnership

Trust is fundamental to a critical friend relationship (Costa and Kallick, 1993,p.50). They define the critical friend as:

A trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward.

Trust is also to be found in Hobson and Sharp's (2005,p.25) description of a mentor as a 'wise and trusted guide'. Dawes' (2003,p.1) definition of trust is 'to have faith in the honesty, integrity, reliability, and competence of another' and she continues by making a distinction between public trust (the degree to which citizens can trust public services to treat them fairly) and professional trust (the degree to which people and the organisations charged with developing and delivering a service believe they can rely on the motives and predict the performance of other participants). This develops the perspective of

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) who, in the context of organisations, say that trust is a work group's generalised expectancy that the words, actions and promises of another individual, group or organisation can be relied upon. Further, it is 'believing in others in the absence of compelling reasons to disbelieve' (p.342). The principle of reciprocity in trusting relationships is indicated by Costa and Kallick's use of words including 'offer', 'understand' and 'takes time' and is in contrast with Sang Yong Tom and Zhaoli's (2004) definition of calculative trust that is 'the result of rational calculation of the cost and benefit'(p.1). Where one is apprehensive and wary, the relationship is improved by the individual calculation of pay-offs and benefits. Their discussion draws on Dasgupta (1988) and Williamson (1993), and is developed by Bottery (2003), describing the 'threshold point' on a continuum from complete trust to complete distrust. Macbeath (2004), citing Van Leeuw's 'me-too-you-too' principle (2001), asserts that without this principle calculative trust (Bottery, 2003) replaces professional trust. The distinction illustrates the spectrum of trust relationships. One such spectrum is given by Sang Yong Tom and Zhaoli (2004) who list eight sources of trust based on personality, affect, cognition, calculation, familiarity, knowledge, deterrence and institutional.

Bottery (2003) expresses these as a hierarchy beginning with primordial trust (that which we have at a deep, basic level and enables us to cooperate), calculative trust, practice trust (which is based on cooperative work), role trust (which we have because of people's

professional role) and identificatory trust (where someone is totally trustworthy because they will act with our best interests at heart).

Although Bottery asserts that we have trust (at least at the primordial level), Dunn (1995,p.638) writes that ‘the question of whom to trust and how far is as central a question of political life as it is of personal life’; trust is fundamental to our interactions and relationships— when trust breaks down it is often the reason for a cessation of a relationship (for example infidelity and divorce, gross misconduct and dismissal from employment.) Frowe (2005) argues that trust is an essential component of what it means to be a professional but that when we enter relationships we have to take risks and that one ‘cannot simultaneously insist that professionals are trusted whilst imposing an extensive series of prescriptions designed to fully regulate how they will behave’ (p.51). The SIP relationship is prescribed; there is purpose, focus and boundaries (Swaffield and Macbeath,2005) but developing Elmore’s (2006) earlier point, we need to look less on the effect of a policy but the distribution of effects.

The possible effects of this policy, challenges to autonomy and headteacher accountability, are the subject of this research but at this point it is relevant to consider the distribution of effects as seen in reviews of mentoring relationships. Hobson and Sharp (2005) review the mentoring of new headteachers as the ‘help given to newcomers by

veterans' (Southworth(1995)) and identify four factors that influenced success (pp.36-37):

- The availability of time
- The matching or pairing of mentors and mentees
- The qualities and attributes of mentors
- Mentor training.

All the mentors are headteachers who provide support (i.e. a sounding board or catalyst), education (helping them to solve problems) and sponsorship (providing links to people or resources)). They draw attention to the most widely reported benefit of the mentoring arrangements as the psychological well-being of the mentee. It reduced feelings of isolation and increased self esteem and confidence. They observed that the relationship is a dynamic one and changes over time noting that there is an insufficient evidence base on which to draw any conclusions regarding the task oriented aspect of mentoring which focus on the new head's skill development.

Ainscow and Southworth (1996), drawing on Saxl *et al*(1987), identify the important processes as 'open communication, clarifying expectations, legitimizing the role and addressing resistance'(p.10), noting that the environment for their research was 'safe' in that it encouraged the free exchange of ideas and established a shared language and a common set

of understandings. Swaffield (2005), in a small scale project (five headteachers, three LA advisers and two of their managers), concludes that critical friendship as external support for headteachers has the potential to make a significant contribution to school improvement. Later that year Swaffield and Macbeath (2005) drew on Miliband's (the then Minister for School Standards) articulation of critical friendship in terms of the school improvement partner. Critiquing the proposals, they comment on the tension between internal and external approaches to school evaluation; in the 1990s they ran in parallel and little account was taken of the former when applying the latter. Swaffield and Macbeath refer to the 'uneasy juxtaposition'(p.242) of external inspection and honest disclosure and highlight the complexity of the critical friend role expressed in its 'acute situational sensitivity, the micropolitical skills required to work in the policy spaces and the importance of negotiating meaning in contexts where meaning is constantly being contested and refined.'(p.243)

Macbeath (2004) believes that there are three essentials to the relationship between the SIP and the headteacher: that the school is free to choose their own critical friend (although Frowe (2005) argues that lack of choice does not make the concept of trust redundant), that the critical friend is there 'for the school' in a trusted but challenging relationship and thirdly that the focus of the work is broadly concerned with improvement and not constrained by targets and predetermined agenda.

PARTNERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In some aspects of a school's work there is a requirement to form a partnership or collaboration (DfES,2005c,p.9)—otherwise it is a voluntary activity. Fullan (2005) argues that this latter way of working builds capacity and these kinds of “intraorganizational professional-learning communities are deep and valuable” (p.93), because people get good ideas from other practitioners and also begin to identify with larger parts of the system beyond their narrow interest groups. Collaboration gives people ideas they can use, because coming from their peers they are seen as grounded and workable. This description of collaboration matches Hopkins' definition of school improvement (2001). The question raised by this study lies in whether this will encourage headteachers to listen and act because of professional accountability concerns. The tension running throughout is that the relationship is not voluntary, the SIP is accountable to the LA and provides the governors with information.

Partnership and collaboration are not necessarily synonymous but the DfES uses one term to define the other. For example, Education Improvement Partnerships are promulgated as “local collaboration for school improvement and better service delivery” (DfES,2005d, title page) and in the context of a multi-agency partnership between schools

and the Police, “A Safer School Partnership is a collaborative approach between a school, police and other local agencies” (DfES,2006b,p.6). These examples serve to illustrate both the range of agencies that schools encounter but more importantly, in this context, that government uses these terms interchangeably.

The accountability of secondary school headteachers is founded in the relationships, the systems and the structures that make up public schooling. However, where these relationships are voluntary ones, this contributes to a sense of professional autonomy. Nightingale (2007) found that 17% of headteachers’ time was devoted to dealing with external relationships: managing relationships is a significant part of the secondary headteacher’s job. Accountability and autonomy are often linked; for example Smithers and Robinson (2007), reporting on the changes to the role of the headteacher, juxtapose more autonomy with greater accountability.

WHAT IS AUTONOMY?

The dictionary definition of autonomy is ‘right of self-government: personal freedom’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary, p.64). Ballou (1998) describes it as ‘self-law’ (p.103) and Engelhardt (2001) as ‘self-rule’. Being autonomous is ‘being master over what others do to one’ (Bittner,2002,p.226).

Themes in autonomy

The centrality and importance of autonomy is expressed in classical modern philosophy (Bittner,2002) in that 'the will is therefore not subject to the law; but is so subject that it must be considered as also making the law for itself'. (Wolff,1974,p.178).

Hall and Savery (1986) contend that 'if an individual supposedly has decision-making authority but his or her superior regularly checks any decisions; the result is a loss of autonomy' (p.161), but the extent to which accountability impinges on autonomy is affected, according to Oshana (2002), by 'the ability to alter one's preferences and the ability to make preferences in action' (p.273). There is a distinction made between being an autonomous person and acting autonomously (Oshana,2002,p.262); what we are and how we behave or act. The latter is pertinent to the discussion as it brings together the person who is in control and who exercises this control responsibly with a view to the context in which he or she operates.

Autonomy is contingent on self-governance. According to Ballou (1998) themes in autonomy include self governance within a system of principles, competence or capacity, decision making, critical reflection, freedom and self-control (p.103). Oshana (2002) comments that we do not hold small children and animals responsible because we cannot credit them with self-government as we can credit adults. This

introduces the idea that autonomy is relative; the more capable and competent a person is, the greater the degree of autonomy that society can ascribe. An individual can presume a greater degree of autonomy; weaknesses in controls may allow a person to act more autonomously than their remit suggests. Decision making is critical to perceptions of autonomy and the 'willing slave' (Oshana,2002,p.274), because he cannot choose, is not autonomous. Engelhardt (2001,p.293) suggests that whilst 'permission conveys authority or withdraws authorisation', permission in the context of an establishment of particular practices (meaning that liberty and freedom are ceded) does not of necessity make a person less autonomous.

The secondary headteacher plays a central role in school improvement, self-evaluation and, more generally, as the leader of the organisation. Permission to act is given principally through statute but also practised through assumed autonomy (i.e. where a person decides to act in a particular way). Government departments (i.e. the DCSF) and LAs help shape the context of the establishment of particular practices at the respective national and local level. The headteacher interprets and responds to these practices through which autonomy is gained or ceded. Hughes (1985,p.14) conceptualised the role of the headteacher as:

the simultaneous activation of two sub-roles which deeply inter-penetrate each other; the role of leading professional and the role of chief executive.

Although this conceptualisation takes no account of other roles that the headteacher may have, for example as a community leader (Treves, 2007), it provides an opportunity to explore the terms 'leading professional' and 'chief executive'. The role of the chief executive is defined by the Institute of Directors (2006) as being 'responsible for the performance of the company' and 'assuming full accountability for all company operations'. In this sense we see the company as being autonomous and this introduces the idea of the autonomous school and what this means for the headteacher.

What is an autonomous school?

The phrase 'autonomous school' is often used in the context of academies defined as 'independent state schools' (Smithers, 2007). FASNA (Foundation and Aided Schools National Association) describe the autonomous school as 'having the freedom to take informed professional judgements and decisions' (Website, June 2009). Although the term 'autonomous schools' is used to describe schools outside the control of LAs, it also refers to those schools that are performing well according to inspection evidence and test results and 'enjoy 'earned autonomy''. (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 149).

There is a distinction between schools described as autonomous and those that have greater autonomy. The latter was anticipated for all

schools through the NRwS when Jim Knight, then Minister for Schools, said

The New Relationship with Schools enables schools to drive their own improvement, becoming more accountable and autonomous. Schools, with appropriate challenge and support, determine their improvement priorities'

Hansard, 7 Feb 2007:Column 996W

There appears therefore to be a distinction between being an autonomous school (i.e. in the way that an independent school is (Walford,1984,p.2; Tapper and Salter,1984,p.179)) and the publicly maintained school that has autonomy, or where the headteacher practises autonomy. Although politicians and others describe the state school as autonomous, it is subject to control. The extent to which the headteacher perceives their autonomy and accountability is a feature of this study.

How autonomy affects the way we act

How we perceive our autonomy affects the way we act. The effect that social constraints place on groups is well documented by sociologists (for example Whyte(1943), Spender(1980), Ozga and Lawn(1981)). Increased autonomy has been the basis of reform not only in schools but in other public services. Introducing market-based mechanisms and more

autonomy has characterised many industrialised countries (UK, New Zealand, USA and Australia). In each case— both in the school sector and wider public services— a higher degree of professional, managerial and financial autonomy has been given, together with more responsibility for the results achieved. According to Bracci(2009), higher degrees of autonomy go ‘hand in hand’ with extended accountability (p.296) and he makes the point, drawing on Schlenker *et al*(1994) and Olson *et al*(2001), that accountability relates to events and results placed both in the past and future whereas responsibility refers only to the present. It is responsibility that ‘binds together the past and future content of accountability through decisions and actions delivered in the present’ (Hoskin,1996,p.262). The link between autonomy and accountability is clearly an important one as ‘autonomy is the ground of accountability’ (Engelhardt,2001,p.286) and it is to this we now turn.

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

The dictionary definition of being accountable is being ‘bound to give account, responsible (for things, to people)’. (Concise Oxford Dictionary, p.8)

Themes in accountability

Firstly, being ‘bound’ is concerned with obligations and being required by duty to do something. Giving an account is often linked to money, and

this is consistent with the headteacher as the chief executive of a school being responsible for taxpayer's money. Giving an account is defined as a 'narration, report, description'(Concise Oxford Dictionary, p.8) and these two ways of defining an account enable us to model accountability using Frink and Klimoski's (1998) formal accountability mechanisms (e.g. accounting procedures) as well as informal mechanisms (i.e. beliefs, values, cultures). This reminds us of the wide spectrum of responsibility the headteacher holds that includes knowledge and understanding of what constitutes quality in educational provision, characteristics of effective schools, employment law, equal opportunities legislation, personnel, external relations, finance and change (TTA,1998).

How accountability affects the way we act

According to Hall *et al*(2007), (drawing on Ferris *et al*(1995) and Frink and Klimoski(1998)), there are four features of the accountability environment: source, focus, salience and intensity. Hall *et al*(2003) remind us of the accountability *audience* (p.33). Primarily for secondary headteachers this is the governing body and the SIP relationship is an attempt to reconcile the potential gap between what the headteacher and governing body each know. Headteachers are also affected by the views of fellow headteachers, their peers (for example educational staff at the SSAT), parents, pupils and other stakeholders.

Accountability source

This is the source of an individual's *sense* of felt accountability.

Accountability is a very important aspect of the headteacher's responsibility and PricewaterhouseCooper (PwC,2007,p.26) reported that accountability duties occupy 81% of a secondary headteacher's time, with 50% citing accountability as a demotivating feature of their work; and according to the NCSL's written submission to PwC , this is also the reason why 43% of deputy heads and 70% of middle leaders do not aspire to headship. Importantly, 'there are a number of legislative, accountability and resource-related barriers that prevent heads distributing leadership further' (PwC,2007,p.12).

Yet Fullan (2005) thinks that 'accountability concerns come easily to system leaders': perhaps because he sees accountability through the lens of system leadership, defined as a series of interactions, both horizontal and vertical, but also through 'intelligent accountability' that comprises networks and learning communities, shared commitment and peer accountability. System leadership is generally acknowledged to describe the role that school leaders play in working beyond their school borders so that they can contribute not only to the success of their own school but to the system as a whole (Pont *et al*,2008) and is defined by the NCSL (2009) as:

Recognising the importance of connections between different issues, individuals and institutions, encouraging collaboration rather than competition.

This definition fits in with one of the aims of the SIP programme that seeks to ‘enable talented school-leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform’ (DfES,2005a,p.4). Whilst system leadership may be a motivation for SIPs it may increase feelings of professional accountability for headteachers as they may feel a filial obligation to engage with the SIP.

The phrase ‘intelligent accountability’ was used by Miliband (2004) and has been supported by the ASCL⁷ (2004) who define it as:

A framework to ensure that schools work effectively and efficiently towards both the common good and the fullest development of their pupils. It uses a rich set of data that gives full expression to the strengths and weaknesses of the school in fulfilling the potential of pupils. It combines internal school processes with levels of external monitoring...

⁷ Association for School and College Leaders, a professional association representing 13000 secondary school leaders (February 2008
<http://www.ascl.org.uk/MainWebSite/General61a096bb.aspx?Map=B2A6745A715D5F1DD789B314FF28CC5F>)

The phrase 'common good' introduces the moral accountability of headteachers. This is developed by Hopkins(2007) drawing on Sockett(1976). Sockett drew attention to the differences in practice and meaning when defining accountability as 'holding someone to account'. Hopkins asks if the purpose of accountability is to improve quality (i.e. is formative) or to prove that something has been done or achieved (i.e. is summative). Sockett also advanced a distinction in terms of results (an external accountability) or one of professional codes of practice (an internal accountability). Hopkins resolves the tension between the internal and external, the formative and summative, by considering them as a range of ways of defining accountability and his argument is about getting the balance right. Hopkins (2007,p.11) defines 'intelligent accountability' as:

(the) framework which puts a premium on assessment for learning, bottom-up target setting, and ensuring effective and ongoing self-evaluation in every school, combined with a sharper edged, lighter touch external inspection and an annual school profile to complement performance table data.

There is consistency in Hopkins' approach and that of ASCL. The phrase 'bottom-up' is in contrast to the 'top-down' that accountability implies; an example of the former can be found in Leonard (1999) who makes a link between shared decision making, empowerment and accountability.

The accountability source creates a tension that some have sought to address through a 'relative accountability' where the degree of external involvement is proportionate to the stage of development of the school. The key factor is pupil outcomes which affect the judgements made on a school, which in turn determine the attention a school has from Ofsted. Most 'good' and 'outstanding' schools have five years instead of three between inspections (Stewart,2009).

Accountability focus

This is the degree to which individuals are held accountable for their *decision process*.

Patterns of centralization/decentralization and questions of accountability are raised by Hextall and Mahoney (1998). They highlight a context in which there are high levels of responsibility but headteachers are expected to operate 'within criteria and indicators over which they have little control and in which they have little say' (p.138). The effect, according to Fergusson (1994), is that the 'headteacher is ceasing to be a senior peer embedded within a professional group' (p.94). Relevant to this effect is Ball's (1998) 'discourse of right' which he uses to synthesise the broad spectrum of management theory that places human beings as subjects to be managed. He reminds of the 'play and effects of power and domination at work in the direct relationships and immediate structures of the

organisation' (p.74) and the emphasis on methods of appraisal which can be used to 'identify (and punish) 'weak' and 'inadequate' teachers' (p.74). This is pertinent to this discussion as the aims of the NRwS and the job description of the SIP (reproduced in chapter 1) focus on what will be done to the headteacher. The chronology of self evaluation explored briefly in chapter 1 further illustrates the role of Ofsted and the NRwS to actively manage headteachers.

Schofield (2001,p.81) identified a number of roles for the secondary headteacher, writing that:

As a consequence of policy initiatives, managers of [educational] institutions have had to learn to become 'business' managers, entrepreneurial contractors with state purchasers and public strategists, all within an accountability system built around a managed market, but still with central state funding.

With this freedom there is a high level of accountability and a secondary headteacher has to manage a series of relationships, both within and outside of the immediate education sector. DfES (2004a,p.10) phrases the link between relationship management and accountability:

Securing Accountability

With values at the heart of their leadership, headteachers have a responsibility to the whole school community. In carrying out this

responsibility, headteachers are accountable to a wide range of groups, particularly pupils, parents, carers, governors and the LEA. Headteachers are legally and contractually accountable to the governing body for the school, its environment and all its work.

The wide-ranging and all encompassing nature of this accountability relationship is considerable and to add another relationship is compatible with Hargreaves intensification thesis (1994,p.117-120). The impact of this increased accountability for secondary headteachers, according to the General Secretary of ASCL, Dunford (2000) is a change in behaviour:

I have been making the point for several years about the over accountability of headteachers and making the fundamental point that over accountability actually reduces creativity because people are not willing to take risks.

Hansard (July 2000)

The relevance of this quotation to the research questions is this: if the SIP implementation increases accountability then it may bring about a risk averse approach to school improvement or give headteachers greater confidence to act. It is fundamentally about the extent to which headteachers pay for greater autonomy by increased accountability.

Accountability salience

This is the degree to which an individual is held accountable for the *outcomes*.

Hall *et al*(2007) use the example of a hospital setting, where a physician or nurse might be expected to feel more accountable than a clerk or orderly. Applying this to the school setting, we might expect the headteacher or teacher to feel more accountable than the receptionist or the cleaner. Greater professional knowledge and responsibility result in more accountability.

There appears to be no debate on the need for accountability and according to Elmore (2006) it has a ‘firm grip on education policy in virtually every industrialized democracy’ (p.3). Its effect is to create and sustain hierarchical relationships but also is seen as the means to improvement through capacity building. Sun *et al*(2007) argue that ‘pressure without support creates alienation and resistance, while support without pressure tends to be a waste of resources’ (p.94). According to Fullan (1999) rigorous accountability is both a policy-building and a capacity building proposition. This idea is developed by Elmore (cited in NGA (2003)) referring to ‘internal accountability’ as a means to develop consistent expectations about the quality of instruction and student performance. Capacity building means the

school's ability to translate high standards and incentives into effective instruction and strong student performance but also includes the skill and knowledge of teachers and principals, as well as the willingness to diagnose problems and develop instructional improvement strategies.

Set in the context of a discussion on Conservative Government policy, Epstein (1993) reminds us of the accountability that is invoked when taxpayers' money is spent by public institutions providing public service and the role of choice. Parents have the freedom to choose their children's school: if schools do not attract enough 'custom' (her punctuation), they will lose pupils. The accountability of the market is also to be found in Ryan (2005,p.538):

the NCLB⁸ educational accountability requirements are anchored in the market notion of accountability, whereby unsuccessful schools go out of business when students transfer elsewhere.

The function of performance standards receives comment by Harris (2002); she writes that the various school improvement programmes, whilst varying in scope and scale, have all been focused on increasing student performance and achievement and that testing, inspections and performance management have further reinforced an 'accountability-

⁸ The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 holds individuals and organisations accountable through auditable performance standards, with test scores as the key educational outcome.

driven and centrally controlled education system'(p.7). Lingard *et al* (1998,p.89) describe the new state which 'steers at a distance' as one where accountability is measured through the development of a range of performance indicators which are 'promiscuous in respect of goals'. Such policy and practices will affect perceptions of autonomy and accountability, possibly changing what headteachers do and how they feel.

Accountability intensity

This is the degree to which an individual is held accountable to multiple persons and/or multiple outcomes; this can be expressed in terms of 'upward' and 'downward' pulls that model accountability.

The preposition 'to' in the dictionary definition suggests a hierarchical relationship and this is supported by others (Macbeath and Myers (1999) and earlier by Epstein(1993)) who introduced two versions of accountability- market and 'upwards' accountability (p.251).

Whilst there are attempts to reconcile these perspectives on accountability, when writing about the not-for-profit and voluntary sector, Ospina *et al*(2002,p.9) draw attention to the 'upward pulls' (to board members, major donors, government regulators and other authorities) and 'downward pulls' which require 'managers to be responsive to and accountable to partner organisations, clients, staff,

volunteers and organizational supporters'. This description has parallels with a school that has upward accountability to the governors, sponsors (for example academy sponsors), the LA, the DCSF etc. and downward accountability relationships to parents, students, the community and a wide range of voluntary, public sector and private sector representatives. A headteacher has a range of responsibilities to the staff that include professional development, health and safety and payroll. According to Harris (2002,p.10) 'for school improvement to occur teachers need to be committed to the process of change' and Fullan (1992,p.19) comments that 'Rapport with subordinates is as critical as keeping superordinates happy'. The accountability to staff at the school could be described as 'professional accountability'. Although Hargreaves (2003,p.137) argues that there is no consistent 'model of professional accountability', Macbeath (2006), drawing on Eraut (1992) talks of the professional accountability in terms of moral commitment and professional obligations (p.69). In addition, headteachers will be subject to inter-organisational accountability to other headteachers (i.e. as members of professional organisations) and more formally in partnerships and collaborations.

Whilst headteachers may have a moral accountability to their students, the staff and the community they serve, those affected by the actions of the headteacher (the staff and students) are not in a formal position to sanction the headteacher. Parents can withdraw their children from the

school, petition Ofsted for an inspection and staff can raise concerns with governors and the LA.

A spectrum of accountability for the headteacher

The diagram represents these accountabilities:

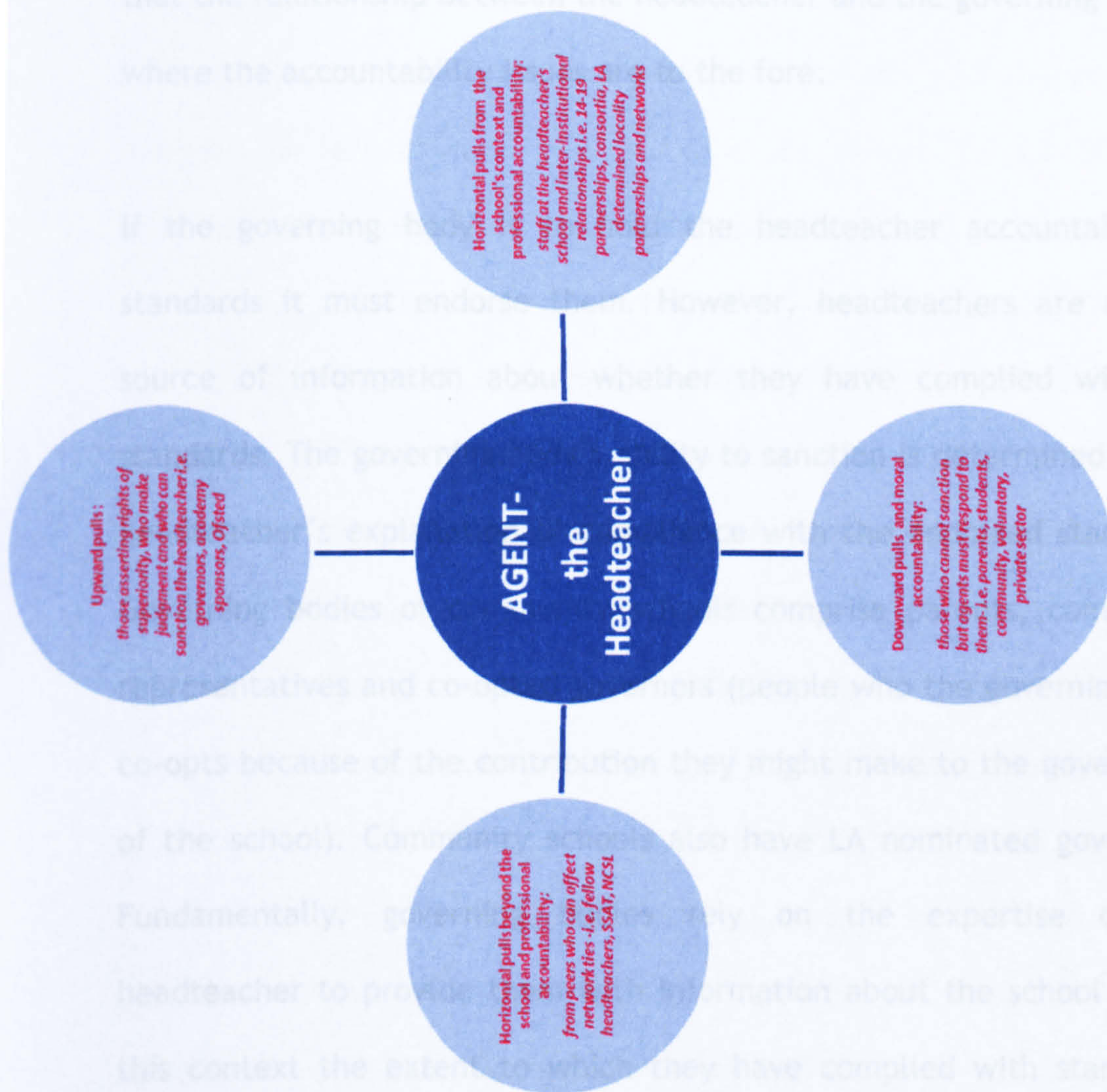


Figure 2.2 A diagram to illustrate the accountability 'pulls' on the secondary headteacher

The spectrum of accountability is wide and each one of the accountability relationships listed could be a study in itself but only one of the groups listed has the power to sanction the headteacher. The law is very clear on the role of the governors in relation to the headteacher (DfES,2004d). The governing body is responsible for the appointment of the headteacher and has the right to dismiss. It is reasonable to expect that the relationship between the headteacher and the governing body is where the accountability issues are to the fore.

If the governing body is to hold the headteacher accountable for standards it must endorse them. However, headteachers are a main source of information about whether they have complied with the standards. The governing body's ability to sanction is determined by the headteacher's explanation of compliance with the endorsed standards. Governing bodies of community schools comprise parents, community representatives and co-opted governors (people who the governing body co-opts because of the contribution they might make to the governance of the school). Community schools also have LA nominated governors. Fundamentally, governing bodies rely on the expertise of the headteacher to provide them with information about the school and in this context the extent to which they have complied with standards. Reliance on information from the headteacher to respond to governors creates conditions of inequality that is an obstacle to accountability (Rubenstein,2007,p.623). Also, from the perspective of a national system, if governors reject the standards set by government then they

may not be willing to judge according to the standards. Similarly, if they cannot judge the level of compliance— because they do not have the information or the knowledge to decide if the headteacher has met the standard— then their capacity to sanction is weakened.

The introduction of the SIP offers change. The SIP negotiates and agrees the standards— for example, the SIP agrees the statutory targets. The SIP has to make judgements and provides information to the governing body (in the form of notes of visits, an annual report and advice to the governors when conducting the headteacher's performance review). The SIP also can raise concerns about the school and the headteacher with the LA and of course to the governing body. The SIP is the agent of the LA and so is independent of the governing body and, of course, the accountability holders (the governors) retain some capacity to sanction. The link between power and accountability is relevant when discussing the relationship between the headteacher and the governing body because of the possible impact that the SIP implementation might have. In describing models of accountability Grant and Keohane (2005) make a distinction between 'checks and balances' and accountability mechanisms. The former are designed to prevent action and the latter always operate after the fact 'exposing actions to view, judging and sanctioning them' (p.30). How accountability mechanisms operate depends significantly on the relationship with the 'power wielder'.

Surrogate accountability

According to Rubenstein (2007), if an individual or a group cannot sanction the 'power-wielder', they cannot hold them accountable. Drawing on Grant and Keohane (2005), the three elements that Rubenstein uses are standards, information and sanctions. The sanctioning component is what gives accountability teeth and distinguishes it from responsibility, deliberation and responsiveness (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). This analysis is consistent with the three features Mulgan (2000) identifies as being part of a 'core sense' of accountability: it is external, in that the account is given to an outside authority; it involves social interactions, with one side seeking answers while the other responds; and it implies rights of authority, where those calling for an account assert rights of superiority over those who are accountable (p.555). This is a 'principal-agent view of accountability' (Weisband and Ebrahim, 2007, p.4) but their discussion of the 'morality play of principals and agents' (p.6) relies on the ability to ask questions and a transparency in the process of collecting information and making it available (Oakerson, 1999). Rubenstein (2007) puts forward a solution to the problems with the standard model of accountability that she describes as 'surrogate accountability'. Surrogate accountability occurs when a 'third party sanctions a power wielder on behalf of accountability holders because accountability holders cannot sanction (or play their role in helping to sanction) the power wielder' (p.624).

Surrogates are independent of the accountability holders and accountability holders cannot sanction them. Drawing on Crewe and Harrison (1998), Rubenstein reminds us that whilst it is important not to exaggerate power differentials between power wielders and accountability holders, it is equally important not to understate them. The accountability that Rubenstein describes is consistent with Weisband and Ebrahim's (2007) description of inter-institutional accountability - a horizontal accountability. They further suggest that such 'quasi-independent oversight mechanisms' (p.8) can improve legitimacy and effectiveness by helping to move from Germain's (2007) 'logic of compliance' towards 'logic of participation' (p.8).

The extent to which the SIP relationship is perceived by the headteacher as being a surrogate accountability relationship is embraced by the research questions. Rubenstein (2007) notes that we evaluate the surrogate on 'how well they substitute for accountability holders' (p.627). Whilst this research is about the headteacher's perception of the SIP relationship, we can gain insight into this question by assessing the extent to which the standards are negotiated. A proxy for this might be the degree of challenge that the SIP offers the headteacher, from the headteacher's perspective.

The early responses to school inspection post-NRwS

The language of the inspection regime has changed. The 2003 Handbook was titled 'Handbook for Inspecting secondary schools' (Ofsted,2003) and its successor entitled 'Guidance for inspectors of schools: using the evaluation schedule' (Ofsted, 2005). This change is part of the NRwS. The DfES asserted that inspection 'has underpinned the steady improvement in standards over the last decade' (DfES,2004a,p.3) but that the new relationship would be based on an 'intelligent accountability framework.' (DfES,2004a,p.3)

In early 2006 Ofsted commissioned NFER to conduct the first strand of an independent detailed evaluation of how the inspection process and outcomes impact on school effectiveness. McCrone *et al* (2006) found that the main benefit of the inspection was perceived primarily to confirm or validate areas that the school previously identified. It was not recognised as a major contributor to school improvement but was seen as an integral element of the school improvement cycle. This report comments positively on the new inspection system, and according to Dunford (2006b) school self-evaluation and the lighter touch inspection were the third most popular of the government's initiatives amongst headteachers. However, in sharp contrast, Brookes (2006) as general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) says that there is 'too much to do' and that "High stakes' accountability is the

main generator of mountains of paper and statistics that disprove other statistics’.

Government has decided that inspection is what it wants and the unique resource of government is to compel (Chapman,2003). Inspection is not benign; its main contribution to school improvement may lie in its value to help schools to prioritise their actions rather than highlighting new areas for action (McCrone *et al*,2006) but it also has the power to categorise schools. The most serious category is where a school is judged to require special measures and such a judgment will frequently result in the headteacher losing his or her job (Dunford 2006b). The threat the inspection process poses to headteachers is considerable and there is little evidence to counter Crawford’s (2002,p.273) comment that ‘for English headteachers, the inspection report has become a public document that judges *their* leadership of the school’.

Linking Autonomy and Accountability

In this table, the themes of autonomy and accountability are brought together to illustrate the interdependence that these two themes.

Table 2.3 A table to illustrate the interdependence of accountability and autonomy

Autonomy	Self governance	Competency	Decision making	Critical reflection	Freedom and self-control
Accountability source	Professional codes of practice and relationships between headteachers emphasise a sense of felt responsibility	Headteachers have the responsibility for the school, most hold the qualification (NPQH) and are appointed by the Governing Body.	Fineman (2003) argues that decision making is rational in retrospect but is often an unfolding conflictual process (cited in Crawford, 2009, p.30).	This is practised through school self evaluation but also through the personal sense of accountability.	Headteachers practise autonomy in the daily decision making in the context of a causal relationship between school process and children's progress. (Rutter <i>et al</i> , 1979).
Accountability focus	Headteachers have a legal framework in which they operate	Headteachers have to diagnose problems and develop strategies.	Decision making is practised through working with governors but headteachers provide governors with much of the information they need.	This is again practised through self evaluation but the intensification thesis leads to critical reflection being played out thorough the work with other agencies	Headteachers are constrained by statute and also that of the publicly funded education system.

Accountability <i>salience</i>	The effect of this is to sustain hierarchical relationships	A poor Ofsted report usually results in the headteacher losing their job.	The inspection process tests out both the headteacher's leadership and management practices.	The focus of the school improvement agenda, as defined by government publications, is pupil outcomes; league tables represent the outcomes in the public domain.	The effect of poorer outcomes is that parents will move their children to more 'successful' schools
Accountability <i>intensity</i>	Headteachers have a broad range of accountabilities. They have most of the information about the school but in terms of student outcomes this is publicly available.	Headteachers have a wide range of responsibilities and are accountable for the standards in the school to a wide range of bodies.	The decision making process is affected by the range of 'pulls' in the accountability relationship. Governing bodies have the principal role to sanction the headteacher.	The headteacher is formally accountable to the governing body and the SIP is there to provide 'support and challenge' to the headteacher.	Headteachers have increased accountability and greater autonomy

SECTION 2

THE ROLE OF THE HEADTEACHER IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

How are schools controlled?

The education system of the late 1980s was subject to a high level of central control in terms of what was taught and many of the systems of school governance. From the mid 80's onwards, profound changes in the relationship between central and local government were observed with Grant Maintained status for schools curtailing the influence of LAs (Elkins and Elliott,2004). The impact of this new freedom was explored by Radnor *et al*(1995,p.1) who found that:

School headteachers and governors are virtually unanimous in their sense of empowerment and enhanced effectiveness resulting from the devolution of budgets and control over staffing and premises.

Contrasting sharply with this sense of empowerment was the prescriptive language used by the DfES and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in that it expressed what had to be delivered by schools in terms of measurable outputs. The National Curriculum set out what was to occur but not why (Elkins and Elliott,2004,p.19) and the 1988 Education Act prohibited a curriculum that was not controlled by the

Secretary of State. For the first time the Act set out a framework for accountability because it brought together for all maintained schools the national curriculum (what was to be taught), the assessment system of national tests (how children would be assessed) and how it was to be reported. Headteachers were obliged to report the curriculum, the provision made and the achievements of the pupils (section 22). Changes also included the inception of the Teachers Pay and Conditions Act (1987).

How do headteachers learn about school improvement?

Hobson *et al* (2003) and Weindling and Limmock (2006,p.333) all refer to the ‘multiple demands’ made of headteachers who live, according to Fullan (1992,p.2), in a ‘non rational world’ because the logic of school organisation is often paradoxical and contradictory. The tasks associated with being the headteacher, while ‘fragmented’ (Bennett and Gabriel,1999,p.44), are nevertheless understandable and amenable to influence although ‘heads and those that work with them must foster perpetual learning’ (Fullan,1992,p.33). Most heads (79%) were in firm agreement that they were able to direct their own learning about leadership (NCSL, 2004), but expressed feelings of professional isolation and loneliness. Those that influence the headteacher are able to bring about a change in the way they think, and therefore how the school runs and consequently, the outcomes for pupils, because ‘educational change depends on what teachers do and think. It’s as simple and complex as

that' (Fullan,1991, p.117). Thomson (2008,p.89) argues that headteachers 'actively decide what to do and when and are resentful of any suggestion that they simply do as they are told.' and therefore influence is key to bringing about a change in headteacher behaviour.

How headteachers are influenced depends on a range of factors including trust, previous experience of working with others and personality traits; in the same way that 'teachers...are more than mere bundles of knowledge, skill and technique...Teachers are people too' (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992). Control and power are important to a headteacher (Mercer,1997). What happens in the school is determined by the exercise of the headteacher's authority.

How headteachers feel has an influence on their dialogue and communications with others. These questions of interaction and discourse, according to Foucault (1972), Lyotard (1984) and Thomson (2008), describe the culture. Macbeath (2008,p.141) draws on these ideas, arguing that 'there is a clear and consistent message that headteachers set the vision and culture of the school and that schools carry the imprint of those personal or professional values'.

What do the studies and reviews of the NRwS tell us?

The pilot phase

Studies on the SIP relationship are few, due mainly to the newness of the programme. Halsey *et al*(2005) conducted an evaluation of trial local authorities. This study involved 93 schools in eight local authorities. They found that questionnaire respondents took an overwhelmingly positive view of their SIP and that they were more challenging and more of a critical friend than previous local authority link advisers. The main issue for headteachers appeared to be the extent to which a SIP was able to challenge a headteacher in order to drive forward the school improvement agenda.

Headteachers asking questions

In October 2006 the NCSL hosted a 'Talk2Learn' on-line discussion with the Director of School Improvement for National Strategies in the 'Hotseat'. The discussion centred on the credibility of the SIP, the relationship with the LA and the involvement of the SIP in the headteacher's performance review.

Concerns were expressed by participants on the compulsion to have a SIP and one contributor expressed the view that:

Professional working relationships are so important, I think that any 'help' could be perceived as an 'attack' in the initial stages by lots of our colleagues. By working together and establishing

trust and understanding positive change and development can result.

(p.20 of print out of the discussion)

The ASCL perspective

In early 2007 ASCL highlighted the importance of the relationship between the SIP and the headteacher from its survey carried out in late 2006. Concerns about the relationship were at the fore but where ‘the SIP has a good relationship with the headteacher, and the governors, the PM⁹ process and target setting seems to work quite well’; and where the relationship feels like a partnership, then headteachers have expressed contentment. Those unhappy with the process feel that they are being inspected, have to wait a long time for feedback and in general, have not developed a good relationship with their SIP. Although mainly positive, most commented that it is too early to judge the impact of the SIP programme.

Reports in the TES and Leader

Reports in the TES (Hastings (3 November 2006) and Judd (22 February 2008)) and ASCL’s periodical *Leader* (June 2006) have focused on the procedural aspect of the SIP role, including interviews with those engaged positively with the programme but highlighting the ‘watching brief’.

⁹ Performance Management

A DCSF commissioned report

Cowen's (2008) evaluation report on the NRwS comprised on-line surveys and in-depth case studies. Cowen received 659 responses from secondary headteachers, with 73% of the response from those who had a SIP with headteacher experience. In-depth case studies were undertaken with 44 schools (of which 21 of these were secondary schools) across 11 LAs plus two academies. The sample was weighted to include LAs involved in the earlier stages of roll out.

Cowen stated that there were five areas of improvement that have been seen over the three years since the policy was announced and these are: improved data availability and use, improved school self-evaluation mechanisms, challenge and support and coherence across the SEF framework, the SIP programme and the inspection framework.

The majority of SIPs (88%) use the SEF to 'effectively challenge and support the schools I work with' (p.3). There is strong agreement from both headteachers (88%) and SIPs (78%) that priorities for school improvement are more effectively identified as a result of developments in school self-evaluation; yet only 43% of headteachers listed the SIP as a catalyst for improving self-evaluation. 88% of SIPs agreed that headteachers are confident to make key decisions based on the outcomes of improved self-evaluation, with 80% agreeing that their SIP has provided informed challenge to the school.

Cowen's research included observations of meetings and the report records an observed meeting where 'the SIP was clearly asking regularly for the Head to justify performance and/or judgements' (p.28) and where 'the SIP provides the Headteacher with support during the visits in terms of constructive ideas to improve priority areas'. The examples cited in the report are where the SIP is 'continually challenging the headteacher on data, target etc.' (p.29) and where a headteacher reports the 'exacting conversations' with the SIP. Some headteachers disagreed that the reports written after the meetings have significant value.

The activities undertaken by the SIP include working with year heads, lesson observations (as part of quality assurance), training on lesson observation and working with individual members of school leadership teams to support a range of school activity.

Headteachers have expressed uncertainty about the accountability of SIPs for the advice offered and there are concerns about the distinction between the SIP role and other LA advisory roles. Headteachers commented on the change in relationship with their SIP, citing the importance of trust and a 'working relationship' (p.65) in order to bring about greater understanding of the school and how it works. For headteachers, this understanding of the context and history of the school is essential for more detailed support. Cowen's report notes one headteacher who comments on how difficult it becomes for SIPs to

review practice when it has changed as a result of the SIP's advice. Overall the report believes that SIPs provide both challenge and support to headteachers, with statements from headteachers recalling a 'harsh message delivered very nicely' (p.114) and an encouragement to undertake greater and deeper analysis being a useful and profitable exercise.

Although governors are not included in this study, Cowen's report does. She reports how governors feel that it was like having 'three mini-Ofsteds a year' and agreed with headteachers that the relationship made the school more accountable. One headteacher spoke of being 'answerable to the SIP' (p.126) and using this accountability to lever conversations with their staff.

The views indicate that the majority of headteachers (between 70 and 87%) believe that their SIP respects the autonomy of the school and has an effective relationship with the headteacher.

SECTION 3

HEADTEACHERS AND SIPS WORKING TOGETHER

How headteachers might respond given what we know about autonomy, accountability and relationship management?

Mercer (1997) highlights the importance of perceptual and cognitive processes in his model of headteacher job satisfaction, drawing on Johnson and Holdaway (1994). The 'inputs' include self perception, relationships and a sense of efficacy. Also, Mercer (1997,p.57) describes the 'microcosm of society which is the school' and it is the headteacher's profound influence on the school that the SIP seeks to influence. What the headteacher expects and how this relationship is perceived will be a synthesis of what they do, how the headteacher feels, about their place in the education system, awareness of autonomy and accountability and an internalised model of school improvement.

Writing about NCLB, Carnoy and Loeb (2002) found that students in high accountability states showed greater gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress grade math tests than those in states with little or no measures to improve student performance; however, Rothstein (2009) argues that the NCLB Act has distorted the school curriculum as schools are only accountable for some of their goals. The first of the above statements suggests a positive educational outcome of accountability; the second describes the possible effect of an accountability system. In

both examples accountability has had an impact on the headteacher's actions.

Bennett (1994) describes how 'management in education has become the management of change' (p.1) and that 'all of us bring to our work a set of 'theories in use' through which we make sense of what is happening' (p.2). Headteachers, as the leaders of their schools, will have their own 'theories' about autonomy, accountability and school improvement.

Whilst the focus for the SIP relationship is school improvement, the relationship will be founded initially on a shared understanding of what it means to improve. This will be the basis of the agenda for partnership. Headteachers will see themselves as responsible for securing school improvement and perceive their autonomy in terms of being able to decide what should be done. As the literature suggests, weaknesses in control may allow people to act as if they have greater autonomy. Therefore, introducing surrogate accountability relationship holder, in the form of the SIP, may be seen as an attempt to strengthen controls. The more controls that are placed on heads the more they cease to become a senior peer in a professional group; they become a group to be managed. Whilst autonomy is motivating, accountability is demotivating and the study will examine, through the research questions, whether this new relationship alters the balance.

Having reviewed the literature I now turn to a discussion of the various methods that could be used to investigate the relationship between headteacher and the SIP.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS OF INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

Sammons and Luyten (2009,p.134) comment that:

During the last 30 years, most Western societies have witnessed the rise of a political climate of public sector accountability. In many education systems, growing attention is placed on the performance of publicly funded institutions.

Performance is a political issue and also of professional and personal importance to the headteacher; attention is placed on secondary headteachers and the SIP relationship is the means by which the government has chosen to reconcile greater autonomy with increased accountability for school improvement and performance. Maslowski *et al*(2008,p.359) describe how the school improvement tradition has gone through a number of phases which are:

- The 1960s— where the emphasis was on adopting curriculum materials;
- The 1970s— the ‘years of documenting failure’

- The late 1970s and 1980s are called the ‘period of success; some successful school improvement projects were conducted in which the process of change was studied’. This was also the time when large-scale school effectiveness studies appeared.

They talk of how the school effectiveness researchers went the ‘scientific way’. Certainly journals including the *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* appear to be written with this in mind. The vast majority of articles that appear in this leading periodical follow the model of quantitative modelling with conclusions based on the analysis carried out using computer based tools relying on correlation and comparative numerical data to support the points being made. This fits with Kemmis’ (1998) description of ‘empirical-analytic research’ that ‘views schools as a delivery system whose effectiveness and efficiency can be improved by improvements in the technology of the system’(in Hammersley,2003,p.188). This contrasts with ‘interpretive research’ that sees education as a ‘historical process and as a lived experience for those involved in educational processes....Its interest is in transforming education by educating practitioners’ (Kemmis (1998) in Hammersley,2003,p.188). Studies documenting organisational practices and routines are constrained by what Cohen and Bacdayan (1994, p.556) describe as the ‘tangled histories’; the way to address this limitation according to Conley and Enomoto (2005,p.13) is to ‘gather data at different points in time, thus yielding a more detailed description of the routines’.

The SIP relationship could be described as an example of this 'technology of the system' as it is an imposed relationship on every secondary school. The extent to which it takes account of the school's context is raised by Levin (2006,p.401) who reminds us that any claim that 'if we can improve things in one school we can do it in all schools if we want' is inspiring but doubtful. There are at least two reasons, according to Levin (2009,p.266) that imposed reform is unsuccessful: either because there is resistance (active or passive) or because threats do not bring about the desired result. We can look at the situation as one in which people's action are 'mediated by situational elements' (Spillane,2009,p.210); however, Conley and Enomoto (2005,p.12) write that 'management can bring about organizational change by changing the rules that constrain behaviour'. They can alter the available resources and drawing on Feldman (1988,p.17) influence 'role perceptions in ways that alter what is appropriate for an organizational member to do'. This new relationship represents a change and whilst this study is not about change management *per se*, it is important to recognise what Hopkins (2007) describes as the 'performance-based reform' (p.23) approach taken by national and local government during this period. This move is likely to have been strongly influenced by Barber's 'deliverology' (2007,p.345), a process defined by prediction, monitoring, management and 'delivery chains' (Barber,2007,p.85) that link, for example, 'the child in Widnes and the minister in Westminster'

(p.85). What happens and how people feel is important (Jansen,2009,p.186).

Designing a study

In this study, I am seeking to find out about headteachers' expectations and perceptions.

Cresswell (2003), drawing on Crotty (1998), provides a framework for designing a study with three elements:

- What knowledge claims are being made by the researcher? *In this section I consider the nature of educational inquiry, the different methodological paradigms and my own approach to this study;*
- What strategies of inquiry will inform the procedures? *In this section I consider quantitative and qualitative methods, the issues raised when trying measure perceptions and expectations, moving to examine the benefits of a 'mixed methods' approach to this study;*
- What methods of data collection and analysis will be used? *In this section I describe the data collection choices, the process and steps taken to collate, analyse and interpret.*

This framework was augmented by Cohen *et al's* (2000) framework of seventeen issues for planning research that include: generating research questions; identifying the priorities and constraints; considering the reliability and validity of the data and findings; considering and deciding

on the research methodology; consideration of ethical issues; data analysis; verifying and validating the research; reporting and writing up the research (pp.73-74).

THE NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY

The different methodological paradigms

According to de Landsheere (1988) empirical educational research was ‘born’ at the end of the 19th. century and began to tackle most of the pervasive educational problems which are still under study throughout the West. There was an existing scientific research tradition and this influenced psychology and education. Binet and Simon’s Intelligence Scale (1905) was published in the early part of the 20th century and it was argued that a test could be a valid measurement instrument in both psychology and education. The rise of the computer has enabled statistics to be used more readily for predictive and analytical purposes; research projects needing lengthy calculations have become possible for an individual researcher. The reaction against psychometrics and survey research led to the qualitative research tradition chronicled by Atkinson *et al*(1988) with seven approaches that have been used in British educational research including: symbolic interactionism, anthropology, sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, qualitative evaluation, neo-Marxist ethnography and feminism. The rise of the ‘self’ as a feature of research is perhaps most obvious in ethnography. The issues that this raises are

illustrated by Hammersley (1984) writing 'Beside the operation of...selectivity in perception and data recording, and the biases that may have been involved, there is also the question of the effects of my presence on what occurred' (p.54). This involvement of the 'self' has led to the 'reflective practitioner' who, according to Osterman and Kottkamp (1993,cited in Crawford *et al*(1994)) 'assumes a dual stance, being on one hand, the actor in the drama, and other hand, the critic who sits in the audience watching and analysing the entire performance' (p.19).

The late 1990s saw at least two discourses in educational research; the first was heavily critical of methodology claiming it to be 'sloppy' (Tooley and Darby,1998); the second is one where the intellectual produces 'localised transferable knowledge' (Oancea,2005,p.158). The methodology was criticised because it lacked the discipline of natural science, where the natural world is described, predicted and hypothesised on the basis of tests, control groups and data. This approach is criticised (Rowbottom *et al*(2006), Carr and Kemmis (1986)) if only because when we look back over scientific discovery we see misconceptions and false analyses; Phillips (2005) develops this argument by commenting that any 'account of the 'nature of science' must always be quite arbitrary' (p.19).

The 'technist ascendancy' (Clark,2005,p.289) grew from a desire to find out what works and to steer teachers' work by constructing data sets,

performing calculations and developing predictive models based on analyses. This view is sharply contested by others including Hargreaves (2003) who argues that the new knowledge society, that is characterised by emails, computers and technological innovation leads us falsely to believe that information technology gives us correct information. He writes that these false premises could lead to erroneous conclusions about what works, hence his assertion that different kinds of schools need differing ways of tackling improvement. What is required is, in Hargreaves' view is:

evidence-informed decision-making where multiple kinds of data (*are*) consulted to inform improvement decisions. Data (*is*) interpreted intelligently, not treated uncritically.

p.135.

Hammersley (2005) argues that there is a duty to ensure there is 'the development of knowledge of some kind' (p.143); the current fragmentation of the research community with its preoccupation with fashionable research methods is incompatible with this although Rowbottom *et al*(2006) assert that all that is required for good inquiry is a 'critical approach to knowledge claims' (p.137) and Hodgkinson (2004) offers a defence for the *status quo* because the various educational research *communities* (he lists empiricism, postpositivism, postmodernism, interpretivism) are not without methodological rules

and that this is exactly what is to be expected on the basis of persuasive theoretical understandings of the nature of learning and inquiry.

The ‘science of society’ was ‘invented’ (Oldroyd,1986 in Cohen *et al*(2000,p.8)) by Auguste Comte (Beck,1979) and gave it the name ‘positivism’. The term has been used in different ways but starts with methodological procedures of natural science being directly applied to the social sciences with the analyses expressed in terms of laws or generalisations. The postpositivist tradition argues that, practically, it is often impossible or unethical to use the kind of carefully controlled laboratory studies characteristic of physics or chemistry for social phenomena. Conceptually, it is often noted that unlike the subjects of natural science, people are reflexive— that is, they may alter their behaviour based on the presence or findings of the researcher.

Research rarely follows just one tradition and the ‘pragmatic approach’ (Arnon and Reichel,2009,p.191) is needed to combine elements of different types because in seeking to research, we are confronted with questions on how we inquire, interpret and explain.

My approach to this research study

Greenbank (2003) contends that research methods cannot be value-free and uses Rokeach’s (1973) categorisation of values (i.e. moral, competency, personal and social) to analyse how values influence the

choice of research method. Rokeach argues that we have 'instrumental values', and these are our preferred modes of conduct that determine what we think is the 'right' thing to do, what we think is the most effective way to go about doing something, what we hope to achieve for ourselves and how we wish society to operate. 'The self is critical' (Ball,1990,p.158) and we 'construct' the facts when we write about policies: an individual's research methodology is constructed through his or her sense of 'how to conduct research.' An important part of research design is to locate oneself as the researcher taking account of the 'multiple' I's'' (Day *et al*,2006,p.607) of both the subject and the researcher themselves.

When the headteacher and SIP meet each situation will have its own uniqueness in that each of the two people will bring their own understanding of school improvement, a view of headteacher autonomy and accountability and notions of partnership. They will together construct a 'social world' (Woods,1979,p.21) and each will interpret the situation. It is the headteacher's interpretation of the relationship that forms the basis of this study. Earlier I wrote of the emotional aspects of being a headteacher and therefore the subjective meaning of the interaction is relevant and highly pertinent.

Although this study is not ethnographic, the approach informs the way in which I attempt to interpret the accounts given by the headteachers of the encounters with their SIPs. Ethnomethodology is concerned with how

people make senses of their everyday world: Garfinkel describes it as 'what really happened' (1967,p.27) by examining what was said and what was talked about and the 'the study of practical actions according to an organised social arrangement' (p.31). Cohen *et al*(2000,p.25) describe the 'situational ethnomethodologist' as one who 'seeks to understand the ways in which people negotiate the social contexts in which they find themselves'. The ethnographic approach has been criticised because a researcher cannot 'possess detailed knowledge of anything more than the particular sector of society in which he participates' (Giddens,1976 in Cohen *et al*,2000,p.27). Whilst we may accept this critique, the interpretive tradition is one which focuses on the individual and requires a personal involvement of the researcher in constructing meaning from the actions and voices of those who are the subjects of the research. By drawing on the perspective of one key informant (i.e. the headteacher) we have a restricted view of the relationship. However Conley and Enomoto (2005,p.13) think that the ethnomethodological approach provides a view on how people give meaning and how this meaning might affect future action. It is not unproblematic, but by acknowledging it we can instead construct a continuum of meaning using the views of members of this group of headteachers.

WHAT STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY WILL INFORM THE RESEARCH?

Quantitative and qualitative methods

Although Mason (2002) writes that ‘the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is not entirely clear-cut’ (p.8), it is useful when examining the possible strategies of inquiry to consider them separately.

Quantitative methods

The dictionary definition of quantitative is ‘measured or measurable by’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary, p.909) and principally involves collecting data in numerical form. Quantitative methods tend to be favoured by positivists because their belief is that the world is ‘out there’, relatively independent of individuals, and can be uncovered by testing hypotheses using rigorous research-collection techniques. Examples of this approach include Schagen (1991), who describes how by collecting data on a group of pupils in one school and repeating the data collection on another group, say from another school, we can compare one group with another. The predictive power of regression and correlation lines suits an approach where a comparison is being made between two sets of data. Krüger *et al* (2007) illustrates the potential that computer based models offer to test out hypotheses on causality. Such studies are able to talk about significance; this is a statistical term where we are able to decide if, for example, the mean of a group differs from an estimate for the population. The weaknesses in quantitative studies are discussed in Lauder *et al* (1998) who point out that quantitative studies are

themselves subject to error (for example, league tables assume a continuum of performance) and that where the quantitative element of a study analyses school effects, 'quantitative and qualitative work should be seen as operating within the context of a 'conversation' about a school's performance'(p.65) and reinforcing the 'necessity to acknowledge the limitations of all research methods' (p.63).

Qualitative methods

Onwuegbuzie *et al*(2009) point to the 'unequivocal agreement that the goal of quantitative research typically is to generalise findings and inferences from a representative statistical sample to the population from which it is drawn' (p.1).

Qualitative research methods refer to any approach in social science that sets out to uncover the meaning of social action. This tradition examines the meaning for participants of events, situations and actions in which they are involved. This reflects the belief of interpretive approaches that only by understanding how individuals build up their patterns of interaction can a full understanding of society be presented. As such it is largely inductive, because in moving from specific situations and contexts to larger ones then explanations are rooted in the actual events and processes in social interaction. Positivists argue that it is difficult to transfer the results on research in one specific situation to another (Campbell and Stanley, 1963— cited in Schofield (1989)). Schofield

(1989) addresses this issue by directing analysis so that we generalise our studies into what is, what may be and what could be.

CHOOSING METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

How to measure perceptions and expectations

Two questions present themselves: firstly, how can we know about expectations and perceptions and secondly is the data available from any other source.

The NRWS could be described as an example of educational decentralization (Maslowski *et al*,2007) or intensification (Hargreaves,1994) or increased accountability associated with greater autonomy; the study is looking at how perceptions change over a period of time. The mensural difficulty is highlighted by Maslowski *et al*(2007) for the following reasons: this kind of change does not take place in isolation, there are other policies that accompany this change that might help or hinder its implementation; the effects are hard to decipher and

as educational policies practically all aim at improving the quality of schooling, it is difficult to assess to what degree observed outcomes are to be attributed to educational decentralization, or whether they should be credited to other policy measures.

p.304

This is an important point because when designing the research project and deciding on the methods we need to be clear whether it will provide headteachers with the opportunity to tell their story.

Mason (2002) makes a distinction between data sources and methods for generating data. In this study the principal source of data is secondary headteachers in the sense that they are the ‘repositories of knowledge, experiences, feelings’ (Mason,2002,p.52) and indeed the KRQs identify the pertinence of expectations and perceptions. How people feel is very important to this study. This study generates data rather than collects data; people will have their views on the SIP relationship, they may not have expressed them and by participating in the research project their perceptions may change. In that sense, although the data is ‘out there’, it needs the participant and researcher to co-construct it. This differs from other forms of data— for example collecting test data from a group— where the data might exist whether the research project was collecting it or not.

The range of research tools from which I could choose included accounts, observation, questionnaires and interviews.

Accounts

Accounts are useful where there is an event or a series of events that can be recorded either in the form of a diary or some other way of

reconstructing the events or experiences. However as I am looking for a change in perception over the course of the study I needed to establish the starting point.

Observations

Observations offer the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data by observing what happens *in situ*. An important part of my research is to find out about the relationship between the headteacher and the SIP but the question I am asking is about how the headteacher perceives the relationship, not what I, as the researcher, think the relationship is about. I might have negotiated access to the meetings between the headteacher and SIP but this would add a layer of complexity to any analysis as the meetings are sensitive ones and the presence of an observer might affect the ambiance.

Questionnaires

The idea of a questionnaire is appealing to a researcher because it offers the opportunity to ask a full range of questions and generate a lot of data but represent a possible invasion of privacy.

The questionnaire can be structured to allow for a range of questions including the dichotomous (yes/no), questions that ask participants to rank statements, ones using a Likert scale and those that ask

participants to explain or describe. The first three of these lend themselves to quantitative analysis but the last provide some of the benefits of qualitative responses where individuals can express opinions.

Interviews

Interviews offer the opportunity to ask more open ended questions and to probe responses that are either unclear or of particular interest.

Gathering data from an interview can be achieved either by note taking or recording it and then transcribing it. However, when an interview is tape recorded this can affect the responses because of inherent wariness of the tape-recorded interview; but note-taking can inhibit the flow of conversation as well as the possible loss of data. Transcribing tapes takes time but increases the researcher's familiarity with the data.

Mixed methods

Creswell (2003) explains the mixed methods approach that is pragmatic and involves strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems. The data collection also involves gathering both numerical and text responses (e.g. from interviews) so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative data.

The research makes a statement about stance and position in the process of selecting the research tool. According to Mason (2002), we use observation if we have an ontological perspective which ‘sees interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these, act on them, and so on, as central’ (p.85) and that ‘knowledge or evidence of the social world can be generated by observing, or participating in, or experiencing ‘natural’ or ‘real-life’”(p.85). The meetings of SIP and headteacher are social acts and in the context of the daily life of an educational professional (of which both headteacher and SIP are examples) a meeting to discuss school improvement is a naturally occurring phenomenon. There are many aspects to these phenomena that might be explored including the experience of the SIP, the setting of the meeting (where does it take place, how is the furniture arranged, what time of day, what day of the week) but for the purpose of this research the focus is the headteacher and his or her expectations and perceptions of the relationship with the SIP. The study does not include the headteacher’s performance review meeting carried out by the governors, with the SIP as advisor.

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to better understand the research problem by gathering quantitative data from a questionnaire examining perceptions about the SIP implementation, and then conducting semi-structured follow-up interviews to probe or explore these results. In the second phase qualitative research questions address the SIP/headteacher relationship with semi-structured interviews

conducted with a sample of secondary headteachers. In the final phase, qualitative semi-structured interviews are used to probe significant areas by exploring aspects of the relationship further.

What people say and how they feel is important to this study and in view of Mason's remarks about how data is generated rather than collected, the tools have to generate the data as well as is possible; therefore I piloted both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. How I collated the responses and managed the data is explained in a later section in this chapter.

STAGES IN THIS RESEARCH

Having decided on the research methodology and how the data would be collected, the next stage is to think about the sample of headteachers.

Creating a sampling frame

The third wave of the implementation of the SIP started in September 2006 and therefore all the 2033 headteachers of the schools in 94 LAs were potential sources of data. The distribution by government area is shown in Appendix A. This 'wave' was chosen for study as it represents the majority 'roll-out' of the SIP relationship; waves one and two being pilots where headteachers and LAs volunteered to trial this way of working.

The secondary headteachers are the primary sources of data. The scope for triangulation within the data sets, as the 'use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour' (Cohen *et al*,2000, p.112), is limited by the focus on the headteacher's perceptions and expectations. However, this research and the reports from journals and other sources will have been carried out during the same time interval and so satisfy the demands of time triangulation criteria (expanded by Kirk and Miller,1986) that it is 'similar data gathered at the same time'.

Advantages and disadvantages in sampling

In practice populations are often too large to work with data on each member and due to considerations of time and cost a sample is drawn from the population.

How representative is the sample?

If it can be assumed that the population is infinite and well mixed then a sample will be representative of a population. The headteacher population is subject to a degree of flux (in that headteachers retire, resign, are recruited) and is mixed in terms of age, gender, tenure and background. However, headteachers will choose whether to participate in a research project and are therefore self-selecting.

Bias

The uncertainty associated with sampling takes two forms— natural variation and bias. Natural variation is due to chance differences among the sampling units (i.e. the headteachers) and cannot be controlled or accounted for by the researcher. Secondly, bias is anything which occurs when taking a sample that prevents the sample from representing the population from which it is being taken. It can occur for a variety of reasons which are usually to do with the definition of the population or the method of selecting the sample. Bias can occur through:

- Sampling from an incomplete sampling frame;
- The introduction of personal subjective choice by the researcher;
- Non-response where responses are only obtained from those who have a particular interest in the study being undertaken;
- Substituting convenient sample units where those required are not easily available.

Bias cannot be reduced by increasing the sample size as every sample unit is likely to misrepresent the population in some way.

Every method of data collection introduces ethical issues and it is to this I now turn.

Ethical considerations

There are ethical issues implicit in the field of social science which stem from ‘the kinds of problems investigated by social scientists and the

methods they use to obtain valid and reliable data'. (Cohen *et al*,2000,p.49). This means that at every stage there may be a potential ethical issue to be considered; this section outlines the major issues and how these were tackled through the design process.

The problem being investigated

The problem being investigated is how people perceive the SIP relationship and the framework used is how the relationship works and how it feels. Inherent in an investigation about how something works is the sense of how it *should* work. Investigating the mechanics of a relationship is more factually inclined but feelings are by their nature personal. Asking people about what happens in a private meeting between them and their SIP and about their feelings represents an invasion of privacy. The investigation includes both of these by looking at how the relationship *works* and how it *feels*.

Ethical issues arising from the methods used

Having chosen to use both questionnaires and interviews a number of ethical issues arise.

Firstly, sending a questionnaire to someone represents an intrusion. People can choose whether to answer all of the questions, some of them

or none but by doing so they become subjects of the research in themselves.

Secondly, interviews involve an interaction with the participant and according to Cohen *et al*(2000,p.292) there are three considerations— informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews. I explained the reason why I was investigating, assured participants of anonymity and how the outcomes of the interviews would be collated and reported. By volunteering to participate in both the questionnaire and subsequent interviews, respondents gave consent to the process. This was important when conducting the first semi-structured interviews with headteachers from Xshire as I am known to each of them. This would either lead to increased disclosures (because they trust me as a peer) or inhibit the sharing of experiences, particularly those that might show the person in an unfavourable light. There is little possibility that I would learn whether this occurred; but by having a range of data sources the effect of this possibility was lessened. Thirdly, as a practising SLP and serving headteacher, a consideration was what to do if I was told something that I knew to be wrong; for example, if there was bullying or an infringement of a person's dignity. I rehearsed what I would say and how I might encourage them to resolve any difficulty but clearly, my role when conducting interviews was that of researcher. However, providing advice could influence a participant's perception of me as a researcher and would need to be documented as part of the study.

A time series for the study

There are four sets of data to present from the fieldwork, first analysed in time periods;

- questionnaires and interview data from a group of headteachers in Xshire in the period before SIP deployment,
- questionnaire data from a larger sample group of headteachers in the period before SIP deployment,
- interview data at the end of year one,
- interview data at the end of year two.

Table 3.1 A table showing each section of the research study and why the timing was pertinent.

Timing	Research section	Pertinence
May 2006	First batch of questionnaires sent to all 33 headteachers in Xshire in the third wave in order to be able to carry out interviews in July. 25 were returned	This was the summer before SIPs were deployed. It was important to get some 'feel' for perceptions and expectations at this stage.
July 2006	Interviews carried out with a sample of headteachers from Xshire (4 headteachers interviewed)	This was the summer before SIPs were deployed to work with headteachers
July 2006	Second batch of questionnaires sent to 757 headteachers from 26 LAs in the third wave (from 1992 schools). 189 questionnaires were returned	These questionnaires were sent out very soon after the first set. The timing was critical as its purpose was to assess perceptions and expectations before implementation.
June 2007	Interviews with 24 headteachers drawn from the respondents to the questionnaire	The headteachers were coming to the end of the first year of SIP deployment.
June 2008	Interviews with 18 headteachers who were interviewed in June 2007 (6 were unavailable for interview).	The headteachers were coming to the end of the second year of SIP deployment.

As discussed in chapter 1, SIPs started working with schools from September 2006 and I used the questionnaire to gather data about expectations and perceptions in the immediate period before SIP deployment. Before September 2006 I wanted to send out a questionnaire and perform some small scale interviews to get 'a feel' for perceptions of the NRwS. Having trialled the questionnaire with two

colleague headteachers, I made revisions and sent the questionnaires in two batches. Firstly to all the headteachers in Xshire and then to a further 757 of the 1992 schools from the 26 LAs (out of 94 LAs) in the third wave of SIP implementation (September 2006). Whilst the latter was going on responses to the first batch were analysed and 4 interviewees drawn from this sample and interviewed in June 2006.

Gathering data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews from a group of headteachers in Xshire in the period before SIP deployment

My sample group was 33 secondary headteacher colleagues in Xshire. I chose to communicate by email, as this is the usual means of contact within this group. It is preferable to offer anonymity to participants but email would prevent this. Conscious of some of the pressures that the participants are under (for example some of this group led schools in special measures) I was now going to add to their workload. These were ethical issues that I had to take into account in research design.

Asking people I know for their views might offer the opportunity to gather information that might not be shared with a stranger but the opposite might be the case. My aim was to produce a questionnaire that would take about five to ten minutes to answer and return via email. This led to a constraint on the number of open questions I could include because open questions take longer to answer and therefore I opted to

follow the questionnaire with sample interviews that were semi-structured.

My questionnaire included a number of dichotomous questions (yes/no responses), structured questions requiring factual information, structured questions where responses were ranked by the participant, rated answers where participants were asked to agree/no opinion or disagree and open questions. As the idea was to assess perceptions then some factual questions together with some less structured questions offered a good compromise in methodology.

Having decided to ask all 33 headteachers to participate, my first step was to trial the questionnaire. I sent the trial questionnaire to two headteachers from this group; I did this because of time constraints and because they both knew that I am doing research and were happy to help me. One was in his first year in post (Steve¹⁰) and the other (Joan) has seven years' experience of headship.

The trial questionnaire is attached as Appendix B and followed this format:

Information about the participant: This gave me information on how long a respondent had been a headteacher, the type and size of school and if the school was subject to special measures. The purpose of this

¹⁰ All names are pseudonyms

element of the study was to see if there were any links between perceptions of the SIP programme and factors such as size of school and length of service.

Ranking of statements: Question 4 of the questionnaire (*How would you describe the purpose of the School Improvement Partner implementation*) asked headteachers to rank the statements in the NRwS document so that I could calculate the mean rank. (I could have used the mode “most popular response” but if without a unique value any comparison is difficult. The mode is easy to calculate and eliminates the effects of extreme values but is generally unsuitable for further calculation.) The statements cover a range of issues from the NRwS that are pertinent to the study. The method of ranking and mean rank is a popular method of comparing statements but is limited by there being no other group to which I can compare (Leithwood *et al*,2006).

Frequency distribution to show the categories of SIPs deployed. The weakness in this data set is the lack of comparative group but it provides a context for responses collected in the interviews. Accredited SIPs come from a number of backgrounds: serving headteachers, officers from local authorities or independent consultants. Retired headteachers can also work as SIPs and are included in the ‘independent consultants’ group.

Frequency distribution to show expectations of a meeting where informants tick all that apply. Frequencies that are numerically close

may not be statistically significant because they do not discriminate responses.

Feedback from the questionnaire was that it took about ten minutes to complete and the respondents liked the fact that it could be returned electronically. Question 4 on the questionnaire was felt to be ambiguous and although Steve thought it was useful to be able to give another reason he could not think of another that would not be covered by the statements taken from NRwS documents. Both Steve and Joan said they did not know what 'intelligent accountability' meant. Joan asked if I meant 'more or less accountability' and Steve suggested that if the question meant more accountability then this was understood. As this fitted in with the research questions I changed this statement on the questionnaire to ask if headteachers regarded this as an 'increase in headteacher accountability'.

Joan commented that there should be an instruction after question 6 (are you an accredited SIP?) to direct participants to question 8 but that this would not be a significant barrier to responses given the speed at which the questionnaire could be completed. The statements in questions 10 and 11 were considered to be sufficient to cover the range of opinion.

I sent the revised questionnaire to 31 colleagues and received 23 responses (Appendix C). I added the responses of the two trial

informants, giving a total of 25. I justify this because no significant changes were suggested to the questionnaire. The timing of the questionnaire was set for 30 June 2006 because the SIPs were to be deployed in September and this date would enable me to chase up any outstanding issues before the end of the school year.

The draft interview schedule (Appendix D) was prepared to enable me to gather more qualitative information than that generated by the questionnaire. I trialled the interview schedule with Joan, who had helped with the draft questionnaire, to see the process as a whole. I found the questions enabled me to find out her perspective as a SIP and follow up questions were easy to think about whilst meeting. I carried out the interview with four headteachers: Steve (headteacher with less than 1 year's experience); Joan (headteacher with 7 years' experience); Carol (headteacher with nine years' experience) and Joshua (headteacher with more than ten years' experience who is also an accredited SIP). I also asked Caroline, a headteacher with two years' experience, but she was taken ill during the research period and so I was unable to interview her. The participants were chosen because they said they were willing to be interviewed and also because they represented each one of the service length categories from the questionnaire. My approach to the interviews was to set out a list of topics I wanted to cover but because of my relationship with participants to adopt a conversational style where follow up questions flowed from the responses. The strength of this approach is that it increases the salience

of the questions and I was able to match the interview to the individual and their context. However, it also offered the opportunity to go ‘off track’; informal discussion is a two-way process and I was concerned that any opinion I might offer would contaminate the data gathered via this route. Providing safeguards and scene setting were key issues to consider when arranging and conducting interviews with people that I know and work with.

Gathering data using a questionnaire from a larger sample group of headteachers in the period before SIP deployment

Appendix A shows there were 94 LAs and a total of 2033 schools in the third wave of the SIP implementation. Having already surveyed 33 headteachers for the pilot study, I did not include them in this section and did not send the questionnaire to the LA where I practise as a SIP because some of the headteachers in that LA would be commenting on their expectations of me. I wanted to use email to send out the questionnaires for the full study. The benefits of this approach were that it would be quicker to send and hopefully, make it easier for respondents. Sending the questionnaire by post would increase the costs prohibitively. However, both the email and postal system presented me with the same issue of finding the address of the school. Mail addressed by name has a greater chance of being seen by the recipient and is a courtesy. I contacted the SIP manager in each of the 94 LAs to inform them of my research and if they would be willing to provide me with the

email addresses and names of the headteachers. Some LAs were very helpful and provided me with CSV files with the requested information, some refused. I declined an offer from five LAs offering to administer as I did not want to introduce this as a factor into the research. For those LAs that refused, I resorted to going to the websites for the LA, finding the list of all the secondary schools and going to the website for each school to find out the name and email address of the headteacher. The two sources of information generated 757 names and email addresses. Some addresses were generic and not included in the sample. I decided that 757 email addresses was an acceptable sample size and, given the scope of the KRQs, that a representative sample from each LA or area was unnecessary.

I was warned by a SIP manager that an email sent to every headteacher in that LA would be rejected as a bulk email. By copying and pasting addresses, I created batch emails that were sent to groups. This was a time consuming process and despite careful copying a few emails were returned, the address on the school website being incorrect.

My questionnaire was sent to 757 of the 1992 schools from the 26 LAs (out of 94 LAs) in the third wave of SIP implementation (September 2006). I received 189 responses (25% of schools approached, 9.5% of schools in the third wave and 5.6% of secondary schools nationally). Over half of the questionnaires returned were from headteachers with more than seven years' experience of headship.

Gathering data from semi-structured interviews at the end of year one

Twelve men and fourteen women headteachers (14.3%) agreed for me to contact them for follow up interviews.

Table 3.2: to show the percentage frequency distribution of the length of time as a headteacher of those respondents to the questionnaire who agreed to be interviewed.

Time in post as a headteacher	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)
less than 1 year	15 (4)
more than 1 but less than 3	15 (4)
more than 3 but less than 7	23 (6)
more than 7 but less than 10	0 (0)
10+ years	46 (12)
Total	100 (26)

I contacted by email each person asking if I could arrange a 30 minute telephone interview with them to follow up my questionnaire with a list of the questions I was to ask (Appendix E). My PA (personal assistant) spoke to the PAs of the headteachers and at the appointed time I made contact. I was unable to speak with two of the headteachers (one was on

sick leave and the other said she was too busy) and it took three appointments before I was able to speak to one headteacher. In total I interviewed 24 headteachers. In every case, interviewees agreed for me to contact them again for a subsequent interview.

I invited the interviewees to tell me about their experience with their SIP and only asked the questions directly if they were not addressed through the dialogue; mostly I relied on prompts, perceptions of the relationship (i.e. how do they describe the relationship) and what impact has it had (i.e. has it made a difference and what are your views on the system as a whole.)

The first section of Appendix E includes biographical details about the interviewees; I took this information from the questionnaires and it helped me to organise my data files. It also acted as an *aide memoire* when speaking to the headteachers.

I linked the question in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview to check that the key research questions would be answered by the two research tools.

The framework of the interview was used to group the questions under the headings of:

A: How the relationship has worked in practice,

B: Perceptions of the relationship,

C: How the headteacher feels.

In each case I asked the interviewees to tell me about their experience and used the questions above as prompts. There are no specific questions about autonomy nor accountability. The study is about perceptions and expectations of the relationship and by taking an interpretivist approach used responses to construct answers to the research questions. For example how headteachers prepared for meetings with their SIP, who is invited to the meetings and what headteachers do with the SIP reports, are used to interpret the headteacher's perceptions of the relationship.

Gathering data from semi-structured interviews at the end of year two

The framework for the second series of interviews (Appendix F) was broadly similar to the first but fewer questions were presented so that the interview focused on those issues relating to the KRQs. I interviewed 18 headteachers; some were unavailable for a variety of reasons.

Linking the questionnaires and the semi-structured interview

Mason (2002,p.147) urges researchers to ask the question:

how well matched is the logic of the method to the kinds of research questions you are asking and the kind of social explanation you are intending to develop?

An important element to the response to this question is to ensure that all the ways in which the data will be generated link to the KRQs. This is illustrated later in the chapter.

SUMMARY

This study uses a mixed methods approach that creates data from the biographical information on participants, quantitative data from how statements are ranked but also generates data from responses to questions posed in the semi-structured interviews.

What knowledge claims are being made?

Analysis is just one stage of the research process. It is preceded by data gathering and succeeded by the process of relating my interpretations to the questions I am trying to answer. Feldman (1995) talks about 'interpretation creation' (p.2) where the purpose is 'create an interpretation of the setting or some feature of it to allow people who have not directly observed the phenomena to have a deeper understanding of them'.

The context of this study is a highly political one; it is an interpersonal relationship between a headteacher and a SIP but also introduces aspects of LA control over schools (through the deployment of the SIP) and DCSF control over LAs (through the structural controls set out in the SIP brief). The relationship is subject to change because of the interplay between the headteacher and SIP but also because of external changes to the ways of reporting, the cpd of SIPs, the deployment of SIPs who are serving headteachers, and not least, the sharing of experiences between headteachers. No study can take all of these into account; that the study focuses on 18 serving headteachers in the first two years of deployment, with most having more than 7 years' experience, provides a basis for interpretation.

A taxonomy of knowledge

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. The term derives from the Greek for 'stand upon' (Spender, 1998, p. 233) and its primary concern is with the extent to which things that people claim to be knowledge stand on a solid footing. A useful way to describing this epistemology further is to draw on Skyrme's (1998) taxonomy, making a distinction between data, information, knowledge and intelligence. Skyrme presents this taxonomy as a pyramid showing how it builds up:

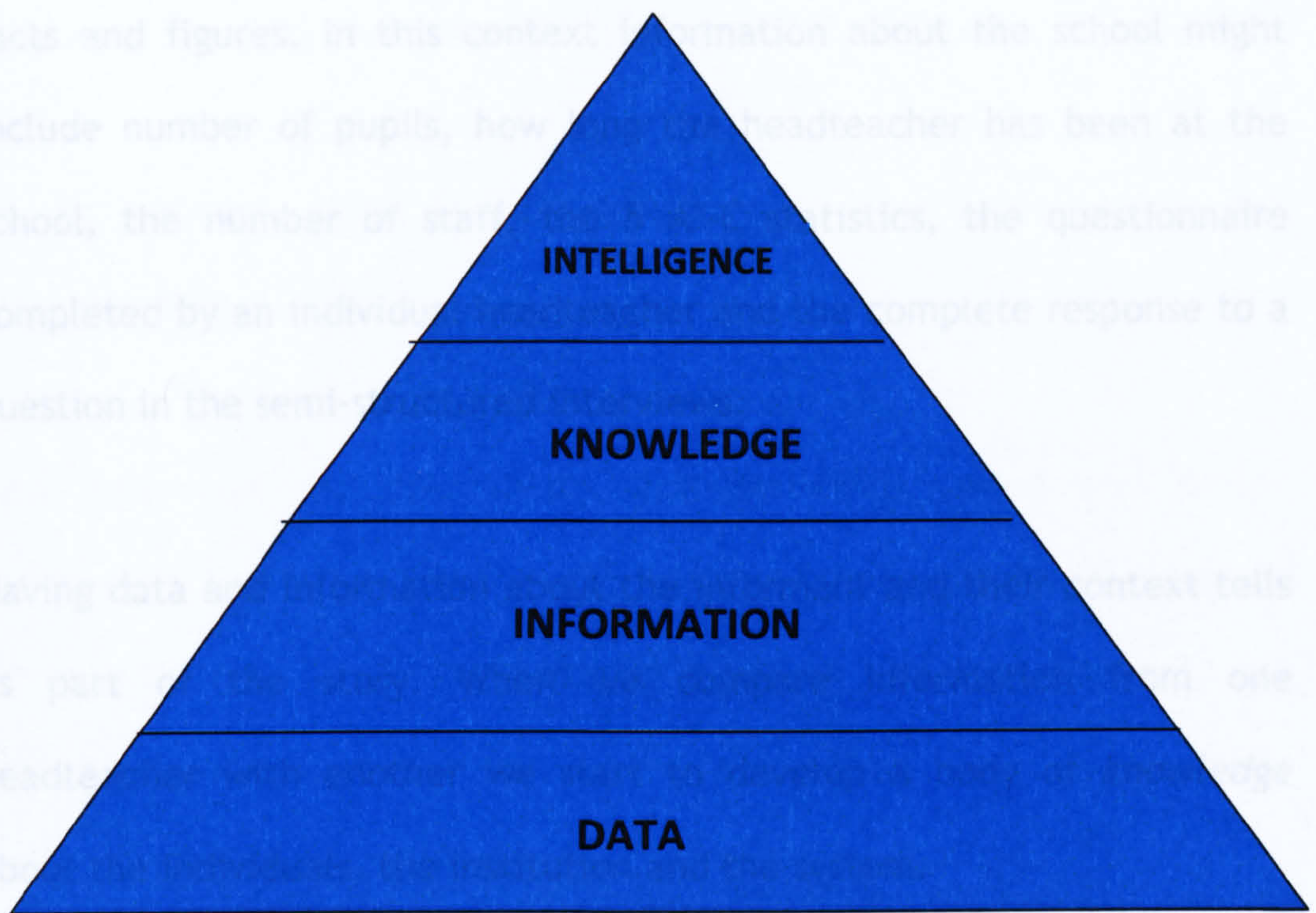


Figure 3.3 *Skyrme's Taxonomy of epistemology*

Explaining this taxonomy

Data is the plural of datum (Latin) and usually refers to facts, statistics or opinions. In this context, for example, data will include the length of time an individual has been a secondary headteacher and the 5 A*-C statistics for the school, rating of statements in the questionnaires and individual statements made in response to specific questions in the semi-structured interviews.

When we collect and organise data into some comprehensible format then the result is a body of *information*. This might be a collection of

facts and figures. In this context information about the school might include number of pupils, how long the headteacher has been at the school, the number of staff, the 5 A*-C statistics, the questionnaire completed by an individual headteacher and the complete response to a question in the semi-structured interviews.

Having data and information about the informant and their context tells us part of the story. When we compare information from one headteacher with another we start to develop a body of *knowledge* about the individuals, the institution and the system.

Moving through the taxonomy, the knowledge we have about individuals, an institution or groups of institutions is compared and contrasted. Through this analysis we gain knowledge of how the people live and work in schools and how they feel. The emerging insights at both the micro and macro levels help to tell the story and the *intelligence* to explain the past, the present and portend the future. The interpretive tradition has a guiding principle that 'human actions continuously recreate social life' (Cohen *et al*,2000,p.35) and we look to understand 'actions/meanings rather than causes'. By comparing and contrasting headteacher's accounts of their experiences and their stories we can begin to construct intelligence about perceptions of autonomy, accountability and partnership.

Analysing the data from the semi structured interviews

Having transcribed the interviews the next stage is to analyse the responses thematically.

Each interview was transcribed, the responses coded and pieced together in two ways. Firstly, the responses were tabulated alongside the questions in the semi-structured interview and then linked to the research questions, as illustrated in the table below.

Appendix G shows how individual headteacher responses were tabulated.

Table 3.4 A table to show how research questions and questions posed to participants are linked.

Key research question	Semi structured interviews (June 2007)
KRQ4:How do English secondary headteachers perceive their autonomy	3. How was your SIP allocated to you 4. How did you feel about the allocation 11. In your view has the work with your SIP impacted on your practice? (e.g. target setting, PM) 12. How satisfied are you with your SIP– if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both
KRQ5:How do English secondary headteachers perceive their	9. What preparation do you do for these meetings?

accountability	<p>10. How are the outcomes of the meetings recorded - what happens to these records</p> <p>12. How satisfied are you with your SIP– if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both</p>
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Secondly, responses were tabulated thematically by linking responses in the transcripts to the themes of partnership, autonomy and accountability I went on to explore through the questions I posed (a transcript is in Appendix H). The discussion on partnership and trust in chapter 2 illustrated the importance of the interpersonal relationships - in this case between the SIP and the headteacher; as such, the SIP and headteacher will bring their own view of school improvement to the relationship. Through the structures imposed, introduced and co-constructed, they create and weave a fabric that represents their relationship. The term ‘fabric’ is used not only because according to the dictionary it means the framework and structure (as in the fabric of the building), but because it can be used to describe the texture of woven or knitted material. The ‘fabric’ metaphor is used by Williams (2006) and by Asp and Fagerberg (2002) as a means of describing a subject.

Williams (2006) describes an ‘infrastructure of responsibility’ and that the ‘institutional fabric’ has three normative aspects;

- institutions define roles and responsibilities,

- they allocate and adjudicate responsibilities and thirdly,
- through a plurality of institutions and associations we experience varying responsibilities and several different forms of recognition.

Headteachers can be represented by this taxonomy; they normally define the roles and responsibilities of the people who work in the school, are responsible for determining staffing structures and are the key decision-makers for promotions and other forms of recognition. In this case they have had the SIP role defined for them. How this is interpreted by the headteacher will shape the interactions and the relationship between the SIP and headteacher is formed through what the parties say and do. The ‘fabric’ metaphor forms two aspects of the research method— looking at the *structure* of the relationship and how it *feels*.

Therefore when I was examining the responses I formed a number of sub-categories for each set of semi-structured interviews and linked responses to each of these sub categories. By using cut-outs of the statements from the headteachers, I created a story-board of responses that is illustrated in Appendix I and explained in chapter 4.

Table 3.5 *a table to show the link between ‘How it works’ and ‘How it feels’ with the questions posed in the semi-structured interviews*

Year 1	How it works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the SIP was selected • The conduct of the first meeting • How much time has been spent with the SIP • The agenda for the meetings • How the outcomes were reported
	How it feels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What it was like working together • What changes the headteacher would make
Year 2	How it works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the SIP has done • How much time has been spent • SIPs and working with governors • target setting • SIPs and working with the LA • Describing the relationship
	How it feels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the headteacher feels about their SIP • Credibility • The interpersonal relationship • Changes in behaviour • The challenge offered by the SIP

The weakness in this study, from a methodological point of view, is that there is very little research that can be used to triangulate the findings.

Also, the sample of headteachers in the study is self-selecting in that they chose to respond to the questionnaire and agreed to be interviewed. Consequently, stratified sampling was not possible. Random sampling should be used to obtain representative statistical samples; according to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2009), drawing on Micceri (1989), 'the rampant use of non-random samples suggests that the majority of quantitative data in the social and behavioural sciences is not normally distributed' (p.2). However, the outcomes of this research will not include statistical generalisations but interpretations of the perceptions and expectations of a sample of headteachers. They are a random sample in that they were contacted by chance.

There is no one body that represents headteachers and they form a loose congregation representing different contexts, affiliations and perspectives. This is a factor of headteacher organisation that adds strength to the validity of the research method. A tool for relating the interpretations is the continuum suggested by Gray *et al* (1985) of those views that are idiosyncratic, to those in the middle that are widely held. At the other end of the continuum views are so deeply internalised by most people that they are not consciously questioned. This will be used as a framework for discussion in the conclusion (chapter 5).

Looking forward to the data presentation, analysis and interpretation

Therefore the study continues into chapter 4 with the presentation and interpretation of the data. In order to improve validity and consistency only those who were interviewed in both years 1 and 2 have been included in the analysis in chapters 4 and 5.

By analysing each aspect of the relationship as it is played out, I seek to be able to express it in terms of the effect on the headteacher.

Chapter 4

HOW THE RELATIONSHIP WORKS AND HOW IT FEELS

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how headteachers have reconciled their autonomy with the accountability imposed on them by the SIP relationship. In this chapter, the data is presented chronologically, starting with the questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews, which asks for expectations about the SIP relationship. The data from the questionnaire is grouped under three headings: the purpose of SIPs; perceptions of partnership, autonomy and accountability; and how headteachers expect the relationship will work. The data from the semi-structured interviews at the end of years one and two of SIP deployment is analysed and interpreted using the ‘fabric’ metaphor introduced in chapter 3; how the relationship works and how the headteacher feels.

Towards the end of this chapter Bottery’s taxonomy (2003) is applied to the data from years one and two in response to the question ‘Do headteachers trust their SIP?’

SUMMER 2006: BEFORE SIPS WERE DEPLOYED

The questionnaire

Twenty five headteachers responded to the May 2006 (first batch) questionnaire survey.

The purpose of SIPs

Table 4.1 shows that building the capacity of schools to improve was regarded as the most important statement with 80% of informants ranking it “1” and 92% ranking it as one of their two most important. The second highest ranking statement was to enable schools to access the support they need to improve, with 52% ranking it in the two most important. Almost one quarter (24%) ranked the increase in headteacher accountability highly.

Table 4.1: Distribution of responses to ranked importance of statements describing the purpose of SIPs (the most frequent in bold type).

	Percentage ranking of the six statements (numbers in brackets) 1=most important 6= least important					
Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
To build the capacity of schools to improve	80 (20)	12 (3)	0 (0)	8 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform	4 (1)	28 (7)	20 (5)	32 (8)	8 (2)	8 (2)
To increase headteacher accountability	8 (2)	16 (4)	16 (4)	20 (5)	24 (6)	16 (4)
To enable schools to access the support they need to improve	8 (2)	44 (11)	20 (5)	12 (3)	12 (3)	4 (1)
To improve data systems	0 (0)	0 (0)	28 (7)	8 (2)	40 (10)	24 (6)
To secure better alignment between schools' priorities and the priorities of local and central government	4 (1)	8 (2)	16 (4)	16 (4)	12 (3)	44 (11)

N=25

Six of the seven headteachers with less than one year’s service ranked ‘to build capacity of schools to improve’ at the highest level and ‘to increase headteacher accountability’ as one of the lowest importance. This suggests that new headteachers might not fully appreciate the role

of the SIP in terms of an accountability relationship. The remaining headteacher, whose school was in special measures, reversed the rankings. The increased accountability associated with this category may have influenced his response.

Perceptions of partnership, autonomy and accountability

Table 4.1 showed that the headteachers in this survey gave a low ranking to an attempt to align local and national policies. Similarly, the role of ‘talented school leaders playing a part in system-wide reform’ was less important to heads than more immediate concerns over building capacity.

The NRwS brings about a change in the relationship between the school and the LA and having asked about LA support, table 4.2 suggests headteachers’ perceptions of autonomy and partnership.

Table 4.2: Distribution of responses about ways in which the LA supported and informed headteachers before the SIP implementation

Preparation by the Local Authority (LA)	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)
LA has held conferences and other meetings	5 (2)
LA has communicated in writing only	51 (20)
LA has not helped me to prepare	36 (14)
I didn’t know I would be visited by a SIP this school year	8 (3)

N=25

Respondents ticked all that applied.

Half of the respondents (14/25) felt that the LA had not helped them to prepare and that the LA had relied on written communication (20/25). Three new headteachers (with less than one year’s service) did not know that a SIP would be visiting them in that year, raising questions about the effectiveness of any communication that might have an impact on perceptions and expectations. However, it might be that headteachers do not think that the LA has a role to help them prepare for working with SIPs. 24% of headteachers from this LA intended to be SIPs; the vast majority expressed no intention.

The LA is responsible for employing and deploying SIPs to schools, and table 4.3 illustrates the profile of SIPs showing than 20% are LA officers but no ‘home’ headteachers were to be allocated.

Table 4.3: Distribution by profile of SIPs deployed in Xshire

Who is your SIP	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)
A headteacher from your own LA	0 (0)
A headteacher from another LA	44 (11)
A LA officer from your own LA	8 (2)
A LA officer from another LA	12 (3)
An Independent consultant	24 (6)
Unknown	12 (3)
Total	100 (25)

N=25

The NRwS aim is to engage headteachers as SIPs. At this early stage less than half of SIPs in Xshire (44%) are known to be serving headteachers.

How headteachers expect the relationship will work

The first meeting in a new relationship is important and calculative trust (Bottery, 2003) could be anticipated. The data in table 4.4 indicates that none regarded the first meeting as an irrelevance; two saw it as an unwelcome addition to their workload. The majority of responses were positive.

Table 4.4: Distribution of expectations of the first meeting with the SIP

Expectations of the first meeting	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)
a professional dialogue with someone you can trust	41 (13/32)
a meeting that will help me to improve my school	44 (14/32)
an irrelevance to your work	0 (0/32)
an unwelcome addition to your workload	6 (2/32)
no opinion	9 (3/32)
Total	100 (32)

N=25

In forming their views, headteachers expressed their feelings and table 4.5 shows that the majority (84%) are content because each believes that they know their individual school sufficiently well to enable them to manage the relationship and 56% believe the programme will be of personal benefit. There is some confidence that it will be better than what has gone before (40%) but a significant proportion (48%) express no

opinion on this matter and 72% have no opinion on whether the SIP will provide challenge and support.

Table 4.5: Distribution of responses to statements summarising perceptions and expectations of the SIP relationship (most frequent in bold type)

Overall	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)		
	agree	no opinion	disagree
Content because I understand the process	56 (14)	28 (7)	16 (4)
Content because I am confident that I know my school	84 (21)	16 (4)	0 (0)
Content because I think the programme will be beneficial to me and my school	56 (14)	44 (11)	0 (0)
Content because it will be better than what has gone before	40 (10)	48 (12)	12 (3)
Discontent because I don't have time to prepare for these meetings	4 (1)	48 (12)	48 (12)
Discontent because I don't think my assigned SIP will be able to provide me with the challenge and support I need	4 (1)	72 (18)	24 (6)
Discontent because I was happy with the LA monitoring process	20 (5)	52 (13)	28 (7)
Discontent because I don't know enough about what will happen	20 (5)	44 (11)	36 (9)

N=25

The overall picture shows some confidence but a sense that judgement is suspended. Two headteachers expressed considerable discontent; agreeing that it was an unwelcome addition to their workload having ranked 'increase in headteacher accountability' highly.

The interviews

Four headteachers were interviewed: Candace, Joan, Joshua and Steve. Performance data is summarised in Appendix J.

Expectations of the SIP relationship

Headteachers explained how they decided on the ranking for headteacher accountability, as shown in table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Distribution of headteacher interviewees responses to ranked importance of statements describing the purpose of SIPs.

Statements	Candace	Joan	Joshua	Steve
To build the capacity of schools to improve	1	1	1	1
To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform	4	5	2	5
To increase headteacher accountability	5	4	3	2
To enable schools to access the support they need to improve	2	2	4	3
To improve data systems	3	3	5	4
To secure better alignment between schools’ priorities and the priorities of local and central government	5	6	6	6

Joan commented that the SIP relationship

will be used for that (accountability) purpose... the relationship between the SIP and the governors is a bit dubious...this could increase the vulnerability of the head. But I suppose as long as it's someone who understands what the job is, it'll be OK.

Joan went on to explain that she thought that there were inherent 'dangers' and was concerned that if the SIP failed to appreciate the contextual issues of the school then the headteacher's position could become vulnerable.

Rubenstein (2007) argues that we evaluate the surrogate on how well they substitute for the accountability holder; but they need information in order to do this. Steve said that his greater knowledge about the school would help him to manage the accountability relationship:

It's all the same to me really... I can pull the wool over someone's eyes if I want to but I want someone I can trust— to help me think. Ofsted can do that a bit— but so few of them have any idea what it's like doing the job that it's very difficult to engage with them.

Steve's view is that the role of the SIP is to help him to think through the issues at his school and that the professional critical friend is a role that would meet his needs.

He responded positively to the possibilities of the relationship:

Highest on my agenda will be managing key stage 3 to key stage 4. We have considerable success at 3 but our kids are not able to sustain that improvement— it needs to be refocused.

Steve was very confident that he would be able to manage the SIP so that their discussion would be to his agenda.

Candace was very concerned about the possibilities of the new relationship. She described meetings with the LA as ‘beating meetings’ because she would come out of the meeting feeling that she had been ‘beaten’ (that is, as if physically punished) and that when with her SIP, that she would have to:

listen and be told how bad things are rather than engage in constructive dialogue about improvement.

She said:

I think it’s going to be used to make things more difficult for heads. It’s going to increase headteacher accountability— there’s no question of that. It’s an unwelcome addition to all I have to do.

although her expectations for SIP meetings were:

I hope that the conversation will happen— so that it benefits the school.

Candace and Joan's concerns are contrasted with Joshua. He was very keen to stress that the SIP relationship was not about greater accountability:

It's absolutely clear from the SIP stuff that it's about providing challenge and support for heads...that's all.

Interviewees were asked about their expectations of the SIP meetings. The comments showed some uncertainty about what was going to happen although there was a clear focus on data and improvement. Whilst expressing worries about accountability, Joan was confident that working with a serving head would address those concerns and was hopeful of what she described as a 'professional dialogue'. At this stage Joan did not know anything about the SIP allocated to her school other than that he was a serving headteacher and hoped:

a critical eye is cast on what you are doing, well informed questioning, suggestion of alternatives

I asked her how she would begin a meeting with her SIP

I will need to give a context— not self justification - contextualise the data.

She explained that the SIP had to 'prove' himself to her and that he 'should be able to suggest what to do to tackle the issues we face' and that 'he won't be much use if he can't'.

Although Joshua is an accredited SIP he was unable to articulate expectations except to talk about a 'professional dialogue' and said:

I don't know really. It's probably going to be a bit of a chat about the data, he'll want to have a look at my improvement plan— and then discuss what I'm going to do next.

All interviewees said that the SIP relationship was about building capacity of schools to improve, but none suggested that they had anything to 'give' the relationship. Informants appeared to see the SIP as someone with whom they could potentially have a relationship, but this was expressed in a rather 'one-sided' manner. Joan said that she was hopeful of the relationship and contrasted it with Ofsted:

Ofsted come and go. And you never see them again— and they're not really interested in improvement— just making judgements. But with the SIP, the relationship is immediate and personal— we're talking about my school— and hopefully he'll be interested in helping me to improve my school— it'll work because it's my priority as well.

Steve spoke with some excitement at the prospect of working with his SIP and he explained:

I had a chap called Thomas come to see me last year— I found his input really valuable— so I'm judging it on how the chap who came for the head's review...I'm interested in how he managed it— he can say what he likes but there is no more stern critic of my school than me. It should be better than the LA people— they've never run a school— my LA adviser was a head of

department 20 years ago before he started working for the LA and hasn't worked properly in a school since then.

Joshua emphasised the importance of the relationship:

It really is about helping people to improve— it's a big job and we need someone to talk through the stuff with and support us— it can be really lonely doing it day in day out on your own. The LA don't really have the ability to do this— how many of them have headship experience? Hardly any.

Candace stressed the importance of trust:

If the SIP is someone who can be trusted, it would be good to have an external view from someone with no axe to grind...

Headteachers believe that the SIP could make them more vulnerable. This small sample raises issues about how headteachers will manage the relationship and how their perceptions and expectations have been shaped by previous experience.

The responses suggests that the SIP is not necessarily a threat to headteacher autonomy as it will depend on successful relationship management. It is evident from these headteachers that, whilst there are concerns about an increase in headteacher accountability, they will be able to manage this relationship.

Having analysed the data from Xshire, the next stage was to summarise all the questionnaires.

Analysis of questionnaire survey conducted in summer 2006

In total 189 responses were received.

The purpose of SIPs

The majority of respondents, as shown in Table 4.7 consider that the purpose of the SIP implementation is to build the capacity of schools to improve. The statement referring to headteacher accountability is the most widely distributed and the percentages illustrate the range of ranking for this statement. Only two schools were subject to special measures; both gave the highest rank 'to increase headteacher accountability'.

Table 4.7: Distribution of responses to ranked importance of statements describing the purpose of SIPs (the most frequent in bold type)

	Percentage ranking of the six statements 1=most important 6= least important					
Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
To build the capacity of schools to improve	75	14	5	5	2	0
To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform	3	29	19	22	10	17
To increase headteacher accountability	11	16	17	22	21	13
To enable schools to access the support they need to improve	11	37	19	17	13	3
To improve data systems	0	2	19	16	41	22
To secure better alignment between schools' priorities and the priorities of local and central government	2	6	19	16	14	43

N=189

Perceptions of partnership, autonomy and accountability

Headteachers’ perceptions of the SIP implementation were generally positive, focused on school improvement and less about the wider perspective of policy and system alignment. The vast majority of headteachers (76%) do not intend to be SIPs.

The engagement with the LA at the preparatory stage is roughly the same as that in the first questionnaire suggesting that there is no expectation of help, as illustrated in table 4.8

Table 4.8: Distribution of responses about ways in which the LA supported and informed headteachers before the SIP implementation

Preparation by the LA	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)
LA has held conferences and other meetings	30 (57)
LA has communicated in writing only	61 (115)
LA has not helped me to prepare	30 (56)
I didn't know I would be visited by a SIP this school year	5 (9)

N=187 with 237 responses in total.

As illustrated in table 4.9, the majority of deployed SIPs are headteachers from another LA; in total 62% might be unknown to the headteacher as they come from another LA or are independent. The majority group is headteachers and therefore this might explain the positive response to the aims of the SIP relationship; headteachers might be more positively disposed towards other headteachers and so feel that this will be a supportive relationship.

Table 4.9: Profile of SIPs deployed to respondent’s schools by the LA

who is your SIP	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)
A headteacher from your own LA	6 (12)
A headteacher from another LA	32 (60)
A LA officer from your own LA	27 (51)
A LA officer from another LA	8 (15)
An Independent consultant	22 (42)
Unknown	5 (9)
Total	100 (187)

N=187

How headteachers expect the relationship will work

Those headteachers whose SIP was a headteacher from their own LA (12 respondents) all expected a professional dialogue with someone they could trust; of those whose SIP was a headteacher from another LA (60 respondents), 75% (45 people) expected a professional dialogue with someone they could trust and a meeting that would help to improve the school, 15% (9 people) expressed no opinion with 10% (6 people) describing it as an irrelevance to their work.

Where the SIP was an LA officer from the headteacher’s own LA, expectations were split between a meeting that would help to improve the school and an irrelevance; all those whose SIP was an LA officer from another LA described their expectations as either an irrelevance, an unwelcome addition to their workload or expressed no opinion.

Table 4.10: Distribution of expectations of the first meeting with the SIP

Expectations of the first meeting	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)
a professional dialogue with someone you can trust	51 (114)
a meeting that will help me to improve my school	19 (42)
an irrelevance to your work	5 (12)
an unwelcome addition to your workload	14 (30)
no opinion	11 (24)
Total	100 (222)

N=189

The data in table 4.11 suggests a broadly ambivalent view of the SIP relationship. In the majority of cases, headteachers expressed no opinion.

Table 4.11: Distribution of responses to statements summarising perceptions and expectations of the SIP relationship (the most frequent in bold type)

Overall	Percentage of responses (numbers in brackets)		
	agree	no opinion	disagree
Content because I understand the process	35 (66)	59 (111)	6 (12)
Content because I am confident that I know my school	57 (108)	43 (81)	0 (0)
Content because I think the programme will be beneficial to me and my school	41 (78)	59 (111)	0 (0)
Content because it will be better than what has gone before	27 (51)	68 (129)	5 (9)
Discontent because I don't have time to prepare for these meetings	5 (9)	76 (144)	19 (36)
Discontent because I don't think my assigned SIP will be able to provide me with the challenge and support I need	8 (15)	83 (156)	10 (18)
Discontent because I was happy with the LA monitoring process	19 (36)	70 (132)	11 (21)
Discontent because I don't know enough about what will happen	13 (24)	73 (138)	14 (27)

N=189

Although figures in table 4.5 are small there was greater ‘agreement’ on understanding of the process and possible benefits to the school. This reflects the comments in the interviews where headteachers expressed

discontent with the LA. However, this is an issue to be explored in the interviews from the wider sample.

Themes emerging from the data in the period before SIP deployment

The data collected suggests that headteachers believe they will be able to manage the SIP relationship.

*Table 4.12 compares the ranking of the statements, in order of importance, from respondents in Xshire with all other respondents.
(Percentage ranking in brackets)*

Rank (Xshire)	Statements	Rank (All respondents)	Statements
1	To build the capacity of schools to improve (80%)	1	To build the capacity of schools to improve (75%)
2	To enable schools to access the support they need to improve (44%)	2=	To enable schools to access the support they need to improve (37%)
		2=	To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform (29%)
4	To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform (32%)	4	To increase headteacher accountability (22%)
5=	To increase headteacher accountability (24%)	5	To improve data systems (41%)
5=	To improve data systems (40%)		
6	To secure better alignment between schools' priorities and the priorities of local and central government (44%)	6	To secure better alignment between schools' priorities and the priorities of local and central government (43%)

N₁=25/33, N₂=189/757

This suggests that there is broad agreement in the expectations that headteachers have about the SIP programme and that they expect it to help them to improve by building capacity. Headteacher accountability

is ranked higher by all the respondents than the Xshire sample but given that the overall order is the same it suggests that it is no less important to Xshire headteachers than others.

More than a quarter of responses from both samples feel that the LA has not helped them to prepare (31% and 27% respectively) but more respondents from the national sample knew of meetings and conferences that the LA had held (5% and 30%). About half of respondents from both samples confirmed that the LA had communicated in writing only (49% and 56%). This might explain why the three out of the four interviewees were unsure about what would happen at meetings with their SIP. In both cases the majority of headteachers did not intend to be SIPs.

The majority of SIPs in both samples were headteachers (44% and 38% respectively). The Xshire respondents were to have double the proportion of headteachers to LA officers (44% and 20%) whereas in the national survey the proportion of headteachers and LA officers was broadly equal (38% and 35%). For both samples the proportion of independent consultants is a significant one (24% and 22%) – this group is employed by the LA specifically for the role of SIP. How expectations and perceptions are affected by the background of the SIP is a factor to be explored at interview.

A larger proportion of headteachers in the national survey expressed the view that the meeting with the SIP was an unwelcome addition to workload (14% compared with 6%) but very few agreed that it was an irrelevance. Most respondents in both samples thought it would be a

professional dialogue with someone they could trust (41% and 51%). The literature review suggested trust is a feature of this kind of relationship. Both samples show that judgement is being suspended and this is illustrated by the high proportion of headteachers who expressed no opinion in response to the statements in tables 2.5 and 2.11. A larger proportion of respondents in Xshire expressed contentment because they understand the process.

The questionnaires revealed some concerns about accountability that the partner relationship will present. The main issue for headteachers appeared to be the extent to which a SIP was able to challenge a headteacher in order to drive forward the school improvement agenda. How headteachers respond to this new relationship, whether they perceive it as a partnership and see benefits, is key. The evidence from the interviews with Xshire headteachers is that they think of the relationship in terms of what they will gain and there being no sense of anything to give. Hargreaves' (1994) discussion of the intensification thesis is focused on the "contrived collegiality" (p.90) as a situation where teachers are scheduled and required to meet for "administratively defined purposes". Hargreaves' description of the Faustian bargain that trades increased preparation time for contrived collegiality leads us to consider whether similarly the gains of the NRwS will be paid back through an increase in accountability and loss of autonomy.

Headteachers are leaders of their own organisations but they are also members of a congregation of secondary headteachers in the public education system. This group is neither unified nor a consensual entity.

However, all headteachers will be subject to the NRwS and all will have an appointed SIP.

Using Hopkins' (2001) definition of school improvement, the SIP programme might be expected to impact on the raising of student achievement and improving the school's capacity for providing quality education in times of change, but only if it focuses on the conditions that support the teaching and learning process. This is more likely if the headteacher perceives the relationship to be one focused on increasing capacity and helping to bring about improvement. If the headteacher perceives the relationship as a threat to autonomy and if trust is low then it is possible that the impact on school improvement will be lessened.

SUMMER 2007: AFTER ONE YEAR

Twenty-six headteachers from the major 2006 survey were willing to participate in follow-up interviews and eighteen were interviewed at the end of both years one and two.

The headteachers

Details about the headteachers and their school are contained in Appendix J.

How the relationship has worked

This study examines two aspects of the relationship: how it works and feels.

The recruitment of SIPs

Although the LA is responsible for the appointment and employment of SIPs, some have involved headteachers in the selection and deployment. David commented that he volunteered to be part of the selection process and that:

It was one of the best things I did as I influenced the person who was going to be my SIP. It is important to me to match the SIP experience and their philosophy to the head. There has to be a degree of respect and challenge as well as credibility....The most important thing to ask them and find out— could they get the balance between challenge and support— that was the criteria....I asked them “how will you support the head?” otherwise they become ‘just someone else to deal with’

For Louise, being able to have a say in the deployment of SIPs was essential and ‘helped to produce professional confidence’. Her experience contrasted with Theo who complained

There’s been no consultation in the deployment. Relationships are very important to me and I don’t have that with my SIP. The LA published a plan but it didn’t involve any headteachers at all. I know what’s wrong with my school and I need to be able to get on

with it and talk to my staff. A few less imposed things and a bit more time and I might stand something of a chance.

There is an inherent inequity at this stage with some headteachers appearing to choose their SIP with others having the person imposed upon them. This is possibly a portent of the future relationship but also a view that the relationship is crucial and the match is important. Theo's point about 'knowing what's wrong with my school' supports the data from the questionnaires and interviews with headteachers from Xshire, where headteachers expressed some confidence because of their knowledge of the school. Theo's comment reflects a threat to his autonomy in that he complains that the LA has not worked in partnership.

The SIP is contracted to spend five days per year working as partner to another school. All of the headteachers had met with the SIP at least three times; the average was 4, and a range of 3-8. One headteacher, Angela, has met with her SIP three times and meetings lasted three hours; she felt this to be excessive commenting that:

the concept of 'light touch' has been lost - it's completely gone.

There's an agenda driven by the LA and before I decided the agenda

And how do you feel about that?

It depends what their real function is. Are they answerable to the LA? The LA has their role but there should be an opening for the head's agenda as well.

(italics— researcher's prompt)

Angela was unhappy that the meetings with her SIP would focus on an externally directed agenda. Angela felt that she should decide the focus of the meeting because she 'knows the school and knows what needs doing' —she saw this as a loss of control.

The first meeting is an important step in the relationship and several interviewees commented on how they managed the first meeting, their impressions of their SIP and how it influenced their actions.

the activity of the first meeting

For Mark, the first meeting was a very positive experience:

It went really well— she's also a head - and I know she got a lot of information about me and my school. I did a bit of digging around and found that she had a similar context, she has a similar catchment. In my eyes she had credibility from day one— she's not too far removed from where I am and where my school is.

Anna, who at the time of the interview was very unhappy with her SIP, explained that:

he came via the LA— he has three or four schools in the LA. I didn't have any choice— his profile looked reasonable though. He

was sitting in reception and my new deputy said ‘what is *that* man doing in *this* school’— and was told it’s Anna’s SIP. My deputy said - ‘he has taken two schools into special measures’. What can someone like that contribute to us?

Janis described the SIP experience as ‘really useful as I’m an acting principal’ and ‘very supportive...being asked challenging questions but not trying to catch me out’. Critical to Janis’s experience has been the way that she and the SIP have agreed the agenda for their meetings. She said that ‘although he obviously has an agenda from the LA, we’re able to work on it together’. Angela’s experience is different. Angela questioned the credibility of her SIP, highlighting that her SIP has been a head for four years whereas Angela has been a SIP for twelve. She describes how her SIP was:

‘rule driven’ and very ‘data driven’. She threatened me with the LA if I didn’t set higher targets. She insisted on following the LA’s agenda of things we had to talk about even though, for my context, some of it wasn’t relevant to what we’re doing.

Candace had a similar view. She referred to her previous remarks:

It’s turning out as I thought. The SIP has definitely been ‘got at’ by the LA. It’s so obvious— he’s making things very difficult for me in the same way that the LA did before. He doesn’t understand what it’s like in my school— and he never will— he hasn’t been a head. We talk about things at the meeting but the notes of visit give a very different tone.

All of the headteachers referred to the 'LA agenda' at some point and expressed this either as a point of concern or gave some sense that this was something that was being done 'to them', but Jacob explained that he asked the SIP

to do a science review. I know him well as he is in the advisory service. So I got him to do two and a half days helping us do a science review— and it became very developmental. It has given us a bit of extra time as well because he's done a job I needed doing.

Jacob, like all of the headteachers interviewed, referred to the SIP as 'my SIP', in the same way that they spoke of 'my school', 'my staff', 'my governors', suggesting control through ownership.

how outcomes were reported to the LA

Each headteacher commented on how efficient their SIP was in producing notes of visit and they appreciated that they all had the opportunity to read and comment on the notes before being sent to the LA. Sally said:

Well, he records the meetings for the LA— but, quite frankly, they are so anodyne and full of jargon that I don't read them— I just glance at them to make sure that there's nothing stupid and then they get filed.

and Jane said

I have also filled forms in and sign the notes when I'm happy with them. They go to the LA because they pay him.

For these two headteachers, the reporting to the LA was significant.

Jacob's response was to questions the necessity of the records:

I could do without the SIP and the notes of visit— I know my school. Do they need the extra layer of paperwork? It should be inversely proportional to what the school's capacity is.

Jacob sees the relationship in functional terms rather than a reciprocal one. He feels he has little to learn from his SIP. His tone was very relaxed but suggestive of an 'I don't need this, but there are plenty of people who do' position. Likewise, Sally's comment about LA records was delivered in a relaxed manner but her tone was dismissive of the process.

There were variations in practice during the first year— headteachers were aware that the SIP is a LA agent pursuing 'their' agenda. However, headteachers deployed SIPs to undertake a range of time intensive activities that were not necessarily part of the SIP brief, for example reviews of departments. In doing so, there was evidence of headteachers controlling the relationship through managing the SIP's activity.

In some cases the LA continued to hold its monitoring meetings with the headteacher. Theo commented

We had our first meeting - talked about target setting and following that we had the head's PM meeting with the governors.

In the spring we did some monitoring activity so there was the same activity going on in each school but we'd just done this with the our LA monitoring work....I think because we've had meetings with the LA, there's too much input. I hope they are going to make the agendas a bit freer

His tone was measured and he described the meeting as something over which he had no choice and of no benefit. Jane remarked that her relationship with the LA has changed since working with the SIP and that she did not 'see the LA very often now'. Anna referred to the 'single conversation', saying that she 'has the single conversation five times as I still have the meetings with the LA'; for her 'single conversation' has added another layer of accountability. She developed this point as, coincidentally, I carried out this interview on a day when she had held separate meetings with National Strategies and the LA concluding with a meeting with a LA adviser where they discussed all the issues from the meetings held earlier that day.

For Andrea, principal of a school in special measures, whilst the SIP is well matched in terms of experience other issues came to the fore:

we are in a school of deprivation and my SIP also works in a similar context— so that's good. I have a SIP, plus an LA representative and it has made it very difficult. He does a lot of talking at me and then I have the meeting with the LA— they talk at me as well. But they don't seem to talk to one another.

Andrea explained the effect:

Leading a school like this is hard work and you get lots of people sent to talk to you— and they all have an interest in getting you to do what they want to do. But it's me who has to decide because I'm the head. Having lots of meetings with external people means less time for the really important people— my staff. And instead of us talking about the plan or whatever, I have to spend time in meetings filling people in— at my meeting with so and so, we decided to do this. If they just read one another's notes then that would be a start instead of relying on me to explain.

For Andrea, the SIP is part of the 'system' that she works with and there was no sense of her SIP being any different from the range of people she met with.

the activity of subsequent meetings

When headteachers were asked to describe subsequent meetings, over half, like Jacob, deployed the SIP to complete subject reviews, thematic reviews and joint lesson observations— activities associated with LA advisor work. As headteachers and SIPs worked together over the first year there was a blend of activities and these included meetings with members of the leadership team. In all cases, SIPs reviewed the school SEF and commented on it. Janis commented very positively about the work that her SIP did and the impact it had

He challenged me on the success criteria we'd written into our SEF— and made me think a lot about my ambition for the school— he helped me by using the Ofsted criteria throughout and going

through it with a fine toothcomb. This changed the way I wrote the SEF and the school improvement plan. With the SEF I got so bogged down with it, going through with him, with him saying 'what if' and 'so what' it really helped. He keeps asking me 'why are you doing that?' and I've had to think really hard to answer that because he knows about the wide range of things we could do.

David continued to be positive about the SIP implementation and described dialogue that is 'off the agenda' as being the most valued and most effective:

It just happened that she was in when things came up and it was really useful. There are things that I think about— what am I going to do. Should I exclude or not? So we've talked about that sort of thing— I suppose it's not really a good use of her time— not very strategic is it. But that's the daily life of a head.

His SIP provided feedback on the SEF and helped him to prepare for an Ofsted inspection. He describes her as 'challenging' and

The team is pretty new and she has helped us to get a more realistic view of what we're doing. There is now some realism in our SEF; she asked us uncomfortable questions. We thought we were good— we were giving people a 'good' when observing lessons but our SIP made us think and so we revised our thinking and made them 'satisfactory'— we've become more critical.

Theo, a headteacher for 3 years, valued the external view of his school's performance that the SIP provided. The comments varied considerably during the interview from 'he does a lot of talking at me and very little listening to me' to 'he brought home to me that some of what we do is good. My SEF is much better focused this year as a result of his comments'.

Louise, a headteacher with 14 years' experience, stated on several occasions that the SIP had had no impact on her work with phrases that include 'it hasn't changed my conclusions', 'I don't think anyone can challenge my thinking' and 'it hasn't changed the way I work'. When probed deeper on this question, she reflected further and commented that

His evaluation of our plan, our SEF and the way he encouraged us to link these to the ECM¹¹ outcomes was fortuitous because Ofsted came and we were complimented on this by them.... he has been a good objective assessor of our data...he hasn't come to any different conclusions but has agreed with our analysis.

Angela described her experience differently. She describes herself as a 'very experienced head'. She described a meeting where:

I'm telling her what we're doing. She's impressed with what we do but isn't able to suggest anything different. She suggests we

¹¹ ECM- Every Child Matters

should include some vocational courses but we reject that— that's not our context— we're a serious academic school.

In an interview where the SIP is dismissed as someone who 'simply cannot offer me any challenge at all', Angela comments positively that her SIP gave 'very useful feedback on the SEF— and that was nice'. Sally, a headteacher with a similar tenure, said that the experience 'hasn't been too painful' and how initially she was very tentative. Her SIP 'didn't highlight the differences— just the areas of agreement' but at subsequent meetings 'he was careful to be challenging but not disrespectful'. Sally said later that her SIP was

Gently challenging, not hammering me over the head. He has pulled me back and made me be more analytical. The experience has been fruitful and reflective. There's time for compliments and he has said good things where they've been justified— and I have to do the same.

Steve reflected on the comments he had made in the first interview in expressing his disappointment with the SIP allocated to him and said

I really thought I was going to get someone who'd really engage with me. I don't want someone who will just say— 'very good Steve, that sounds great Steve'— I really want someone who is going to challenge me hard. I've only been doing this job a short time— surely there's more to learn.

These responses tell us much about attitudes to this new relationship. Both David and Janis commented on the beneficial effect of an external review of the SEF; whilst Theo valued this too, commenting on the way the SIP had moderated Theo's judgements, the style of delivery caused him some discomfiture. Some, notably Louise and Angela, are reluctant to admit that the SIP has anything to offer, with Steve being hungry for development and his expectations being lowered by the experience; this is contrasted with Sally who commented on the manner in which the SIP offered challenge— the gentle, subtle approach suited her.

what changes in practice the headteacher identified

Headteachers found it hard to identify specific ways in which their practice had changed as a result of working with the SIP. Jacob, who has been a head for 11 years, commented on the way that his SIP has worked with him, contradicting himself during the conversation:

I've been a head for 11 years, you know what to do— the SIP hasn't given me ideas. Having someone who is a credible current head who affirms your practice is really good— we have really good discussions— there are ideas that come out that I take on board

The initial response was to reject any suggestion of challenge but, like Louise, reflection brought about recognition of positive impact.

Likewise Anna,

Honestly no. Perhaps it's sharpened up target setting. We set a higher target this year.

Some of the more experienced headteachers, who are extremely confident in their knowledge of their school and in the role, express the view that they have little (or indeed nothing in Anna's case) to gain from the SIP relationship. However, the process of reflection reveals that the SIP has been challenging and brought about change. Some heads continued to stress that the SIP had not been challenging and that moreover, as heads they had nothing to learn. Although not expressing statements asserting autonomy, the arguably arrogant comments by Angela, Louise and Jacob are tacit statements of confident people who are paying 'lip-service' to the SIP function. They assert their willingness to be challenged but their response is defensive by assertively stressing their perceived superiority.

David continued to be positive about the experience stating that

it has re-prioritised what we do. Not a radical change of direction. It has raised the priority in some areas— particularly standards. She encouraged us to look at CVA, KS2 to KS4, identify students by name and to think about what we are doing for each kid. She asked me what I was doing for a girl in care— and I didn't know. I found out though, very quickly and when I did, it wasn't good enough so we changed it.

Others, for example Mark, explained how having a SIP 'helps me to focus on what I should be doing' and Sally who values the frequent meetings

saying that ‘I like the fact that I see him regularly as it keeps me conscious of the accountability that I have as a head’.

How it feels

credibility

The issue of credibility is an important one for both the government which introduced the NRwS and for headteachers who have to work with SIPs. All of the interviewees referred to their SIP in terms of their credibility. Jacob, headteacher of a Catholic school, explained

He was allocated by the LA. I knew of the person, I knew of his credibility. I would have preferred someone who was a Catholic—we could have refused him but not the alternative.

Whilst not all SIPs have headship experience, Sally said that ‘the LA person wasn’t credible because he had no headship experience’. Rodger, however, offered an alternative view; his SIP is a senior LA adviser and Rodger believes that, because of his extensive advisory experience, he offers credibility

in a sense it feels like the old programme because we’ve the same bloke. I don’t notice any difference.

He continued:

Having a SIP is a sensible way to do it. There’s an inherent danger of it being just one person. It hinges on the quality of that person,

not going native, not ringing alarm bells or some awful clash of personality who then makes a nuisance of themselves.

Referring back to Rodger's questionnaire provides some insight into his responses. He is the only headteacher of more than ten years' experience whose SIP is an officer from his LA. Rodger knows the LA structure and personnel well and his responses to the questionnaire are entirely positive. However, the 5 A*-C of Rodger's school declined by 6 percentage points over the last three years and CVA was low. Having someone who did 'ring alarm bells' in such a situation would be in keeping with the SIP brief. The fact that Rodger does not notice any difference— because there is no difference, it is the same person who appears to have made no changes to what he does— perhaps explains Rodger's contentment with the process.

Angela questioned the credibility of her SIP on the basis of length of service and Anna, making comments about the level of challenge her SIP offers, said that he was 'too nice' and that he is 'a nice man but there's no "wow"'.

the appropriateness of the match between SIP and headteacher

Half of the headteachers commented on the appropriateness of the match between the SIP and the headteacher. For Jacob the issue linked to the credibility of the SIP

I've had good advice from the LA in the past but someone who knows what it's like to sit in that chair— they don't understand

ultimate responsibility and the pressures. Someone who has been a head understands that you have different kids, different staff—they understand. I wouldn't be happy with someone who didn't challenge me— someone without credibility couldn't do that

Jacob is also a SIP and referred to this:

He has been very efficient. He produces excellent reports. In my own SIPing, I try within a week to get the documents back— I'm glad he's like me.

David, who was involved in the selection of SIPs remarked positively on the match. His SIP is head of a school that has a similar context but 'is a few years ahead' of David's school in terms of its improvement. David feels that the rapport his SIP established at the start was important and the common ground they have was significant; Mark comments that his SIP is 'not too far removed from where I am at' and that she was 'willing to ask awkward questions' but 'skilfully matches her questions to things she has tried to do as well'. He commented that his SIP would advise him by talking about what she has done at her school. The potential difficulty of this way of working is explored later in the chapter.

the importance that the headteacher places on the personal relationship

The personal relationship was discussed by all of the headteachers— they were keen to talk about whether they 'got on' with their SIP. There was

an awareness that the relationship would develop. Theo described his headship style as 'being all about relationships'. After a year he did not feel that he had the 'trusting relationship' he needs but believed that he would be able to 'work on it' to bring it about. He was asked how he would describe the relationship he sought:

It's supposed to be a dialogue. It should be with someone who I can talk to about anything at all— nothing is off limits. He seems to think it's his job to come and talk at me— and that I'm going to sit and take it. He expects me to listen to him but unless he listens to me it won't work. He's good— his comments on the SEF were really helpful but without dialogue it won't move either me or the school forward.

Janis contrasted her relationship with the SIP with others:

With Ofsted you feel defensive but when I ask for support e.g. in working out the success criteria for the school improvement plan, then we can put the notice on the door and have quality time together.

Janis brokered additional time, over the five days, to work with her SIP and thought that

You don't have much time to develop the relationship. The whole success or otherwise of the SIP is relationship based. Most systems are possible if the relationships are right.

Jane, although saying that she 'isn't a head who needs a lot of help', remarked that her SIP relationship had been 'less of the critical and more of the friend' and that 'part of the success is when you get someone who 'clicks''. The SIP manager matched us up very well'. She thinks that the NRwS is a good idea and supports the implementation of SIPs but commented

It's a good idea as long as the relationship is right and the SIP understands the school and is astute enough to understand the needs of the head. So you can pitch the dialogue to where the head is.

to what extent headteachers trust their SIP

Most of the interviewees agreed that 'professionally credible critical friend' was an accurate description of their SIP and issues of trust were raised by all of the interviewees, particularly in relation to the role of the SIP in the headteacher's performance review. The issue of trust is explored more fully at the end of this chapter.

However, earlier remarks by headteachers indicated a considerable lack of respect for some of the SIPs. The headteachers are agreeing with the policy— and asserting that having a SIP is a good idea— but in practice there is a dismissal of the SIP role expressed through arrogance, dissatisfaction with the manifestation of the relationship or, where satisfied, the effect is at variance with the policy.

What portents the headteacher offers for the future relationship

Janis's comment about the time it takes to develop a relationship and her view that any system can work if the relationships are right are both illustrative of the concerns expressed after one year. Jacob, from his position as a SIP and a serving headteacher, highlights the importance of the SIP working with a wide range of people at a school, saying that 'the SIP has to get to know everyone— needs to be part of the fibre of the school'. Louise believes that SIPs could do more if engaged in bigger decision making and argued strongly that SIPs should be engaged in both the Ofsted process and the reaccréditation of specialism, pointing out that the LA does not have the capacity to do the kind of work that SIPs do. She commented that the LA benefited from having the objective view of a school that the SIP offers. Her analysis of the SIP relationship was that it has been 'interesting but not entirely stimulating'. She sums up by saying 'the concept is right but we need to do more'. Given her earlier dismissive remarks about her SIP, she presented this opinion as being someone who would not be affected by the policy and that her interest was really to make sure it was right for others.

Much of Angela's interview focused on the concerns she has about the system. Angela expressed strong views about the 'potential conflict in the role' in that the headteacher is unlikely, in her view, to 'open up' to the SIP when that person reports to the LA. She poses the question 'can one person carry out the roles of adviser, supporter and inspector at the same time?' Angela contrasts the SIP experience with that of a mentor when she was first headteacher in a neighbouring LA. Her appointed

mentor met regularly with her and she was able to ask for advice. She described it as

open and honest— the people giving the advice were really experienced and we could ask one another for advice. People trusted one another. That trust is absolutely essential. They've tried to package it up into one conversation and I don't think it works...I know if I speak to a colleague he isn't going to sneak off to the Borough - but will the SIP do that?

Clarissa contrasted her SIP experience with her previous work with an LA adviser. She said that her SIP spent his time checking things out for the LA and that 'it's very difficult being a head— it's good to have someone there for you' but that the SIPs she knows 'all seem to be non-confrontational people' and wondered if complacency would beset the relationship. Mark was less concerned about this believing that

The data is so public there's no way that the SIP could go native— they've got to challenge.

Three quarters of the headteachers are concerned that they will have to change SIP after three years— a benefit if the relationship is not working— but wondered if the tenure would be better if it were at five years instead. None wanted to revert to the previous arrangements, all preferring the SIP relationship despite the views expressed by some.

SUMMER 2008: AFTER TWO YEARS

Chapter 2 included a discussion of trust. The data indicated a range of opinion on the SIP relationship reflecting concerns over accountability and autonomy. Headteachers like Angela speak of their concerns about confidentiality and how her conversations with the SIP will be shared with others, using the pejorative phrase ‘sneaking off to the Borough’ (*i.e.* the LA). The SIP is paid by the LA and DfES (2006a) set out the procedure for removal of accreditation. This provides a link to Macbeath’s (2004) development of Van-Leeuw’s “me-too-you-too” principle (2001), asserting that without this principle calculative trust (Bottery, 2003) replaces professional trust. The distinction that Macbeath makes is a relevant one because it further illustrates the spectrum of trust relationships. How the headteacher and SIP work together in the second year was investigated using the questions in Appendix F to structure the interview. The questions centred firstly around how the relationship worked (*i.e.* was it the same SIP, what activities the SIP engaged in during the year, any engagement with governors) and secondly, examining how headteachers feel about the relationship by asking how the relationship has changed and how it has worked out.

How it works

Is there continuity in the SIP relationship?

The SIP deployed to the school in year 1 continued to work with all of the headteachers in the sample, bar one. Anna moved on to her second headship in another LA and she said

I changed the SIP as soon as I arrived— it was a good opportunity to make a change. However, the SIP they wanted me to have is also a member of the partnership¹² I now work in. I thought that this would be crossing a boundary. I had a better idea of what kind of person I wanted and I'm pleased with the new SIP.

This comment reveals something about the learning that headteachers have taken from the first year of the SIP implementation but also contributes to what we know about the importance of the relationship; Anna's successful act is a comment on her assumed role and the LA's acceptance of this assertion.

As in year one the spread of engagement with headteachers and schools was wide. In year two, Theo met with his SIP on five occasions each of two hours' duration, Angela, Louise and Jacob each met with their individual SIP on three occasions for up to three hours each time; yet Janis and Nick recalled that their SIPs had spent five days in total in school— although not in a meeting with the headteacher for the entire time. None of the headteachers had ever refused to meet with their SIP

¹² Anna was referring to her 14-19 partnership

but there was no evidence of headteachers proactively seeking meetings; the onus to arrange meetings falls to the SIP.

Several headteachers commented on the benefits of the longer relationship, including Theo who said;

Target setting was a much better process as he now knows the school and it didn't seem so drawn out. Last year we had to explain so much about the context of the school. He came in with his charts and tables and I was arguing that he had to understand our context. His understanding of our context has changed.

what have SIPs been engaged in whilst at the school?

In year one there was evidence that headteachers were gradually directing the activity of SIPs. Theo told me of the work that the SIP had done to support him and his school in helping prepare for Ofsted inspection, commenting that

I was very grateful to the SIP who looked through our SEF and that was very useful. Following our Ofsted we had to resubmit our specialist school application and his comments on our SEF and the plan were very helpful— we were redesignated.

How did this impact on the SIP's work

I don't know, I didn't ask— I asked if he'd have a look through the plan— his school was redesignated a few months before ours— we didn't see him for a couple of months— maybe we used up our allocation of time by getting him to do that.

Could you have had more time with him?

The LA said we could have more time if we wanted— and that they'd pay for it. But honestly, it's a bit of an effort getting everything ready for him and so I didn't pursue it.

In addition, Theo asked his SIP to do a range of monitoring tasks that included pupil work scrutiny.

Rodger described how he and his SIP would fill out the LA monitoring forms quickly and then the SIP would work 'on my focus'. Rodger was keen for his deputy to undertake a new role as part of a leadership team restructuring exercise and asked the SIP to spend a day with the deputy because 'he needed a bit of a steer' by learning what was happening at another school. The SIP spent the entire day working *in situ* with the deputy and Rodger was very pleased because the SIP helped bring about a structural change in the school.

In year one, Sally spoke of how headteachers in her unitary authority had agreed how they would work with their SIPs and she commented how at a LA conference held at the end of year one (summer 2007) 'we sharpened up what we want(ed) them to do'. The outcome for her has been entirely positive because her SIP has undertaken a range of activities that include 'learning walks, a spell of time with the governors and talks with students— it's an excellent way for me to get more feedback'.

However, there was evidence of headteachers using their SIPs to manage their own accountability.

Clarissa, like many headteachers, received advice from her SIP to help prepare for Ofsted through the review of the SEF. Her SIP advised her to judge the school 'outstanding' and this was the judgement that Ofsted reached. Clarissa recounted how the Ofsted team met with the SIP who

argued very strongly that we should be outstanding. He was very useful.

What do you mean by useful

Well, it helped, I think, that this independent person— who is supposed to be impartial— went in and said 'this school is outstanding'. If I'd said it and Ofsted didn't agree, they would say there's a problem with the head's judgement. But if he says it and Ofsted don't agree, then it's a different matter altogether for the SIP but not for me.

Following on from this, Clarissa spoke about some changes to staffing that she wanted to make; she invited the SIP to be part of the interview panel for a senior member of staff because she 'felt confident that he knew what I was looking for, he knew what I wanted and would be very helpful'.

The range of tasks undertaken by SIPs grew over the period of this study. Anna described how her SIP helped her to tackle an issue of capability. Achievement in a core subject was lower than elsewhere and she asked

her SIP to 'do some work with the team'. The SIP undertook a programme of lesson observations, interviews with staff and students, and work scrutiny. The SIP advised the headteacher to begin capability proceedings with the head of subject. Anna felt that the SIP's intelligence was essential. She was asked about her SIP's involvement:

I thought a lot about how I could use the SIP. By making a change from day 1, I got someone who I knew would work with me.

What do you mean, 'work with you'

I think by being proactive. The SIP knew I had requested a change and that if I'd done it once, perhaps I'd do it again. I've got things that need doing and having someone impartial, from an external point of view, was important.

From an external point of view?

If things were going to get difficult— which they can do with capability— I could say 'well, he's the SIP and so he must be impartial' but the staff would know that I'd sent him and so it would send messages to them as well— that things had to improve.

Did the SIP comment on what you'd asked him to do?

I told him there was a problem— and of course he could see this from the data. So I asked him to go and do some lesson observations. He was fine about it.

Of course, if he did it once, it meant I'd get him to do it again, if needed.

This was an important episode for Anna because having succeeded with the LA (in her view) in changing the SIP, she was confident deploying the SIP to carry out internal monitoring work. She believed the staff would see the SIP as her agent. She described the episode as critical.

This notion of a critical episode arose in several interviews. Discussions over the quality of provision were held at Jacob's school. The LA requested that its schools produce evidence of whole school review and Jacob asked his SIP to be part of the leadership team in carrying out this work. The review included lesson observations, work scrutiny, data analysis and evaluation. Jacob commented very positively on the work the SIP did:

He did his homework, he was very well prepared, he contributed a great deal to our meetings. It was like having another head on the leadership team.

The activities listed are not part of the SIP brief but were undertaken by this SIP under the Jacob's direction.

Sally's critical event was a governors meeting. She described how the vice-chair of the governing body was being critical of the amount of progress that the school was making:

The issue was— we are improving. The VC was highly critical of the progress we made during this year. Although results had gone

up, the VC wasn't happy and very critical. I spoke to him with the Chair and then I asked the SIP to talk to him as well— he did a good job with him.

The 5 A*-C GCSE results at Sally's school have improved from 34%, to 38% and 45%; but a CVA measure of 991 would suggest some underachievement. For Sally, this meeting was a critical episode because she felt that the SIP had helped her to deal with a powerful governor who was being critical and challenging the school on its performance. She felt she had an ally.

Jane's context is unusual in that during year two she prepared her school for closure as part of a LA strategy to deal with falling rolls. She spoke very positively about the relationship with the SIP and that he had helped her to maintain the focus on achievement. She commented on how supportive he had been when it was 'very very tough' and, how she and the SIP rehearsed their arguments before an important meeting with the LA. She was tearful at times during the interview and commented that the SIP had 'always been there on the end of a phone'.

David welcomed the continuity that working with the same SIP offered and described how he, and his senior staff, have visited the SIP's school to see how the SIP has tackled similar issues. David said that 'we've deviated from the LA agenda and every now and again we drag ourselves back to the agreed protocols to keep the LA happy'. The issue of accountability was raised by David— he was recounting a discussion with the SIP on the progress of lower attaining students— and he said:

Basically, that was the main dialogue. We were talking about accountability— how she deals with it and how I can deal with it. We’ve talked about this a lot— and had a good knock about on this.

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of models of accountability, including Rubenstein’s (2007) solution to the problems with the standard model of accountability that she describes as “surrogate accountability”; this is consistent with the SIP relationship.

There is some evidence that headteachers, either through their management of the SIP relationship or through the development of the relationship itself, are managing the LA and their principal accountability relationship— the governing body.

How have SIPs engaged with governors?

The principal engagement with governors, according to the headteachers interviewed, is through performance management. David was the only person to refer to the annual report that SIPs are contractually obliged to provide for the governing body. He described the relationship between the SIP and the governors as ‘the one area that has been difficult this year’ and spoke of how the SIP

moved back into the LA model. Her report went down like a lead balloon— it was too technical— the data was over a year old. They were uncomfortable because they felt that they already knew about the school.

However, the role of the SIP is to provide independent information to the governing body and the context of the school is that results fell by 3% to 31%, narrowly above the government's floor target¹³.

Nick's description of the SIP relationship is more of a superordinate one and he said that:

The governors have been able to utilise the SIP as a knowledge resource. They were very pleased with the PM¹⁴ process— they liked the targets that she set for me. They feel that the SIP is independent and an impartial person - they are comfortable with the advice they have. It has made them feel more involved— she is their adviser.

How does the SIP relationship interface with the LA relationship?

SIPs are integral to the NRwS, an important feature being the 'single conversation'. There was evidence in year one that some LAs duplicated the SIP work. Headteachers felt more accountable.

David was positive about the SIP relationship but pointed out that the method by which SIPs broker support from the LA is the weakest part of the relationship:

¹³ The DCSF has a floor target for all secondary schools that at least 30% of pupils should achieve the bench mark of five higher level (A*-C) GCSEs or equivalent including English and maths. http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0004

¹⁴ Performance Management

The LA doesn't seem to react to the SIPs requests for support. The LA doesn't seem to take account of what she says— she makes a judgment and then they come in and check it.

Anna commented that in her previous LA, she had to have two conversations— 'one with the SIP and then again with the LA' that in her new school it was '100% helpful and never feels like 'Big Brother'— and there's none of this duplication'.

Clarissa said that having a SIP who is employed by the LA is an advantage because he knows the LA priorities. However, much of this interview was taken up with having been, in Clarissa's words, 'named and shamed' as a National Challenge School¹⁵ and she felt that the work she had done both with her SIP and the LA left her 'completely alone to face the music'— she was alone when talking to the press and the LA had not issued press statements supporting her. Another headteacher, Theo, was in a similar position and expressed concern about the future in terms of his accountabilities. He was positive about the way that the LA had been 'less prescriptive and less of the 'breathe now'' approach that he felt had characterised the SIP relationship in year one but stressed:

It's not a single conversation because I'm having similar conversations with the LA. I'm now a National Challenge School so

¹⁵ In June 2008 the Secretary of State for Education announced a National Challenge Strategy to raise standards in those schools below the floor target. 638 schools were named as being below 30% 5 A*-C including English and Maths. These schools became known as National Challenge Schools.

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0109

I can look forward to loads of conversations with my SIP, the LA and my National Challenge consultant— and I'm sure more people will join them.

How it feels

How the headteacher describes the relationship

Rodger spoke positively about his SIP, an LA adviser. He expressed confidence in his SIP because he is 'on top of his brief and he does his homework'. For Rodger, that his SIP already knew the school, and most of the staff including all of the leadership team, has been a benefit. Rodger said,

It's like having another member of the leadership team.

Clarissa's description of her relationship bears some similarities. She described how deploying her SIP to have discussions with some of her middle managers had been helpful to her. She told me that three of her heads of department 'didn't quite get it' when the school was reviewing its performance management policy. (Clarissa said that she wanted them to increase the number of lesson observations and use different models to assess teachers' performance.) She told her SIP about it and asked him to meet with them individually to go through the proposed changes; she commented very positively at the change that she believed he had brought about. The term used by her staff for the SIP is 'school improvement officer' and she explained that:

They are used to the idea of an officer from the LA so it makes it simpler to explain. It reminds them who the person is.

How?

The conversations he has with the staff are much easier because he's external. They know that my school improvement officer will talk to them about a range of matters— he gives a menu of activities and we choose what he does. They see him as being under my direction - I decide what he does and I ask him to do things.

But officer rather than partner?

Does the title matter? I'm deciding what he does, where he goes and they know that.

For these two headteachers, the SIP occupies a subordinate place and, particularly in Clarissa's case, deploying the SIP has created this apparent power relationship.

This is in sharp contrast to Nick. He describes his SIP as being

brilliant. She's very abrupt and straight— I'm the other side— more pastoral, softer and she's been pulling me back into addressing the issues— what we need to do, what the data is telling us.

Nick goes on to describe how his SIP has helped him to restructure the school, to identify staff for redundancy and to set up the procedures to bring this about. His description of his SIP is very much of a superordinate who is guiding him - and this is illustrated in his comments on the performance review process:

She has set me some very rigorous and challenging targets. She has quantified the targets I have, to make it very clear what she expects me to do.

And on a more regular basis

She has helped me to see the bigger picture....she will say 'that's not practical' or 'that won't work'.

credibility

The importance of credibility was a recurrent theme in the interviews. Jacob used the word several times in the first and second interviews. For him the match between himself and his SIP is very important both interpersonally and in the profile of the person.

We've been very happy. He's a recently retired head of a decent school...he has credibility. Secondly, he understands us as a faith school— it's very important to us and he's sensitive to the faith. Thirdly, he knows what it's like to sit in the chair— he's not condescending and will work with us.

For Jacob, it is important that his SIP has headship experience. In Theo's case, his SIP's school

is very similar to ours in terms of context— he’s a bit further along the road in terms of progress— but this means I can learn from him because he’s credible in my eyes.

However, David raised a potential difficulty that having a longer relationship posed. His SIP comes from a school that is slightly more advantaged than his. In David’s view, the similarities in their roles give the SIP credibility; he thought that the job of the SIP, which is, in his view, to make suggestions and help would become more difficult

SIPs, as they get closer— it’s harder for them to take the inspectorial role and position. They have to keep coming back— and they become more empathetic.

How the relationship has developed over the two years is important to assessing how perceptions have changed.

David’s remarks are interesting because they offer a portent to the future. He commented positively on the way in which the relationship has developed; it has improved because ‘she has a better understanding of what we are doing’ but ‘has found it harder to make suggestions for action because she knows the range of things we are doing’. For David the relationship is more of a coaching one. Over the period of the study, the 5 A*-C benchmark measure for David’s school declined.

Getting to know one another is clearly has an important part to play in a continuing relationship. Theo said that in the first year that ‘so much had to be explained about the context of our school’. Theo spoke of the way that his SIP’s ‘understanding of our context has changed’— yet over the period of the study, the 5 A*-C benchmark measure for Theo’s school declined, to below the DCSF’s floor target of 30%.

Angela’s remarks— as an experienced headteacher of a selective school, with 100% A*-C throughout the period of the study (and historically) — were:

I think probably what has happened, the SIP has learnt more about the school and how it functions. All they have is paper and as you work through you get to know the people. The SIP now understands our reluctance to do things— telling us to do something says she doesn’t know enough about us.

These headteachers feel that the relations have improved because of what they have done to manage the relationship.

How the headteacher describes the challenge that the SIP offers

The degree of challenge that the SIP offers has changed, according to the headteachers Angela, Theo and David, because the SIP knows their school and understands the context. For Rodger and Jacob, the degree of preparation the SIPs do is a key factor to their credibility. Anna’s

experience of her SIP in year one was of a ‘nice man but there’s no “wow”’, she said ‘Jack¹⁶ has a reputation for being really challenging—but I haven’t seen this’. Sally is positive about her relationship but comments that ‘he’s a nice guy, but there’s no spark’. Sally feels that her SIP just listens to her and doesn’t ask the ‘how do you know’ questions —she wants someone who offers more challenge.

Louise commented in year one that she ‘didn’t think that anyone would change my thinking’. Her comments at the end of year two show she thinks her SIP has become more affirming but no more challenging:

I need a David Hargreaves or someone of his calibre— someone at the front end of educational thinking— who will challenge my thinking really hard. Someone who has the great intellectual capacity and can look intuitively at what I’m doing. I’m happy with the affirming role that the SIP has. At least the current SIP can assure governors that it can work— but it’s not enough for me— I get the stimulation from elsewhere.

The match of SIP and headteacher is clearly important to Louise as it is to many of the other headteachers— both those that welcome the SIP and those who want something else from this relationship.

¹⁶ A pseudonym

How headteachers express their views looking back over two years

In year two there has been less of the common agenda that dominated the early interactions. In year one, David valued the impact that his SIP had in helping them to prioritise their work and at the end of year two commented

If you work with someone long enough you can't keep doing the same thing so we will go more off agenda to build our capacity to improve.

This, he thought, was a very positive development but it also suggested to him that the SIP relationship was becoming less well defined and asked the rhetorical question

Is the SIP really holding you to account or exchanging ideas with you— it's so much about relationships. People want someone between Ofsted and the critical friend— someone who holds a mirror up to you.

Rodger has found the relationship a beneficial one— he spoke warmly about his SIP saying that

He's a good listener— but also a critical listener. We look forward to his visits— when we've had a discussion we feel better.

This was in sharp contrast to Louise who, when probed about the number of meetings she had with her SIP said,

We've met three times this year— when he calls me up and says “can I come in?”— it's not a priority, so we don't bend over backwards.

She said her SIP reports are ‘neat and tidy’ and the attention to detail that some SIPs demonstrate is important. For Jacob, a successful professional relationship is founded in statements such as ‘his paperwork is very good’ and ‘he is very efficient— as a SIP myself I try to get reports back in a week and I'm glad he's like me’. Jacob reflected over the two years and was able to explain the change

If you look back— my conversation is very similar to last year. Last year I didn't know him well— we did all the work— but now that we know one another, we have a relationship. He's not frightened of me nor of the school. I can absolutely trust him and the professional relationship is really good now.

All of the headteachers were able to identify some change in the relationship— for some it lies in the better knowledge and understanding of the school context and for others, like Jacob, it is by spending more time together and doing more together. Although Angela was more positive she expressed concerns:

What is the SIP's role— are they there to support or to inspect the school under another guise. Can you have a partner you work with— can the partner be in an inspectoral role. That's my real issue. If I had a problem, would I have confidentiality— where's

the guarantee. That's the problem that still has to be worked out.

Where do loyalties lie?

DO HEADTEACHERS TRUST THEIR SIP?

There was little sense of headteachers wanting a SIP relationship but given that they had to, wanted a trusting one. Trust was seen as being fundamental to the SIP relationship where it was predicated on the 'professional credible critical friend' but as the process has moved to a greater monitoring and accountability relationship the issue of trust has been manifested in questions about loyalty and affiliation.

Trust is fundamental to partnership and Bottery's normative hierarchy of trust (2003) identifies the stages in a relationship.

Table 4.13 A table linking comments from headteachers to Bottery’s hierarchy of trust

Hierarchy of trust	Definition	Comments drawn from examples from end of year one interviews	Comments drawn from examples from end of year two interviews
Calculative trust	the individual makes calculations— whether the probability that someone will do something that is beneficial to us or at least not harm us	Rodger commented that the quality of the person was very important because a head would not want someone who was ‘ringing alarm bells’ but Angela commented on how she was ‘somewhat cynical’ and that she had been ‘threatened with the LA’ by her SIP. The trust at this calculative stage appears to be less important because heads believe that they know their schools and can manage the relationship.	<p>Angela spoke of her concerns that the SIP would go ‘sneaking off to the Borough’ both in year one and two interviews and was concerned that there was little confidentiality in the relationship. Anna avoided any possible difficulty in the relationship by changing her SIP because he was a serving headteacher in the same partnership. In this case role trust concerns were subordinated by calculative trust concerns.</p> <p>Nick’s experience has been a positive one; he talks of the benefits that the relationship has brought referring to the ‘targets that she set for me’ and the advice offered to governors.</p> <p>Several headteachers referred to the Ofsted inspection and how their SIPs had helped them to prepare and manage the process.</p>
Practice trust	where repeated encounters increase the amount of knowledge of a person and therefore facilitate more accurate calculations	Sally commented that ‘I was very tentative— I had my two deputies with me at the outset. The first meeting— the focus was performance and he didn’t disagree with what I’d said— so we agreed to look at the SEF next. It’s been a reasonably positive experience— he’s been	A number of headteachers referred to the longevity of the relationship, although this was not necessarily represented in frequent long meetings. Theo commented that target setting was a better process because his SIP’s ‘understanding of our context has changed’. David referred to the benefits of continuity and how this had helped them to

		accommodating and so I've been able to tell him more'	deviate from the SIP agenda. The relationship Nick has with his SIP has led to a restructuring of the school and significant changes including redundancy. Rodger's experience has been positive and continues to be so— and he spoke of looking forward to the visits.
Role trust	where we trust someone because they belong to a group with a set of ethics	<p>That the SIP was a serving head was important for many of the heads. Jacob said 'someone who has been a head understands that you have different kinds, staff— they understand what it's like' and Jacob commented 'how can anyone who doesn't sit in our chair know what it's like'. This was countered by Rodger who said that 'it doesn't matter that he's not a head— he's very experienced at advisory work. In his case it's irrelevant. We've always got on— he's very sympathetic'.</p>	<p>Several headteachers commented positively that their SIP was a serving headteacher but this was less of a feature in year two interviews than before. However, there was evidence of headteachers actively deploying the SIP to undertake management tasks that might be associated with headship or a leadership team role. Anna deployed her SIP to gather evidence for a capability review - he did lesson observations, interviews and work scrutiny. Anna used the intelligence gathered to initiate capability proceedings, with the SIP's full knowledge and compliance.</p> <p>Sally used the relationship with her SIP to challenge the vice-chair of governors, who was being very critical of the degree of progress being made; she felt that her SIP would be able to convince and satisfy the vice-chair. Rodger's description of his SIP, 'it's like having another member of the leadership team', echoes Jacob's remarks about 'it is like having another head in the room'.</p>

Identificatory trust	Where we know another so well that we trust without having to perform calculations, gather information and refer to role expectations.	The above comment by Rodger could be considered an example of identificatory trust because Rodger knows the person well and he is fulfilling Rodger’s expectations but measured against the SIP brief it is not an example, especially as there is evidence that he uses his relationship to manage his accountability.	<p>Theo demonstrated identificatory trust in his comments about his SIP; describing school improvement and his headship as a ‘journey’ and that his SIP was ‘further along the road in terms of progress’.</p> <p>In David’s view, the similarities in their roles give the SIP credibility and there are indications of identificatory trust in that he thinks the SIP finds it harder to take the ‘inspectorial role’ - because of the repeated contact but also because SIPs become associated with the school progress. A portent to the future of the relationship is offered when he talks of the need for a critical friend.</p> <p>Jacob’s trust in his SIP appears confident and like Rodger, his SIP has been deployed to fulfil leadership team tasks but the meaning of partnership is one that continues to concern heads like Angela. However, Jacob also is of the view that he doesn’t need a SIP and so this example could represent calculative trust.</p>
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There is a wide range of practice evidenced in the way that headteachers and SIPs are interacting. The obvious lack of respect or credibility that were seen during year 1 are less prevalent but this is perhaps manifested in the way that headteachers are actively managing the relationship through the deployment of tasks associated with being a member of the leadership team under the headteacher's direction. This tells us how some headteachers have reconciled their autonomy with the accountability imposed on them by the SIP relationship. For others, the advice of the SIP is followed - either because of feelings of a superordinate relationship or because, as with Theo, he has a proliferation of advisers and following the SIPs advice, because his SIP is a serving headteacher, he makes the choice as a way of managing accountability.

The final chapter to this study brings together the literature review and the data set in the context of the policy changes that have occurred over the course of this study.

Chapter 5

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The so called “single conversation” which was supposed to take place between the SIP and the head has been hijacked by central and local government setting targets from above. This process should be about shared improvement, not covert control.

Dunford (2009)

Dunford expresses a view that the relationship has become a monitoring and accountability relationship instead of the partnership suggested in the NRwS. This remark is supported by the stories told by the headteachers in this study and the policy changes that have ensued since the NRwS was first suggested in 2004. However, headteachers have found a way to reconcile their autonomy with the accountability imposed on them by the SIP relationship.

This study has investigated English secondary headteachers’ perceptions of the SIP relationship during the first two years of implementation by exploring how the relationship has worked and how the headteacher feels. The study has considered to what extent it brings about a change in accountability and the impact on a headteacher’s perception of his or her autonomy.

This chapter begins by looking back over the changes that have been made at policy level, continuing with a summary of the findings to answer each of the key research questions. Examples from the accounts of headteachers are used to support more general points.

The NRwS promised ‘intelligent accountability’ and the final section to this chapter examines whether headteachers link autonomy with accountability.

REVIEWING THE POLICY

The first publication on the NRwS (DfES,2004a) introduced the ‘single conversation’ where SIPs would ‘offer ...a searching, professional, supportive challenge from outside’ (p.9). SIPs were to be ‘critical friends, skilled in diagnosis of schools’ needs, and in building schools’ capacity’ (p.11). When the first edition of the School Improvement Partner’s Brief (DfES,2005e) was published, the amount of time to be spent by the SIP was specified (5 days, with $2\frac{3}{4}$ days spent in school); significantly, an additional focus to the role appeared in the form of the advice they are required to give the governing body on the headteacher’s performance and school’s performance management systems. The school improvement model was that used in the conceptual representation presented in chapter 1. The second edition of the SIP brief (DfES,2006a) increased from 19 to 29 the number of questions that the SIP might ask, underpinning and flowing from that school improvement model. This second set of questions is more specific and

includes ‘how effective is leadership and management?’ and ‘has the school the capacity to improve?’ These questions are also found in an Ofsted inspection schedule.

Whereas, in 2005, the SIP provided ‘advice to the Governing Body on the headteacher’s objectives’ and a ‘light touch validation of the school’s performance management arrangements’, the third edition (DfES,2007a) requires the SIP to report on the latter and the Brief has grown in size from 22 to 35 pages, with 30 questions to be asked and answered.

Significantly, the role and accountability of the SIP has grown, as illustrated by the section entitled ‘Triggers for Concern’ that requires the SIP ‘having made concerns explicit with the headteacher, (is) to alert the local authority so that early action can be taken’. (DfES,2007a,p.10)

This study is about headteachers; the role of SIPs is a study in itself. However, the way in which the SIP role is expressed has changed. As the ‘Triggers for Concern’ have both changed and grown, the annual report in DfES(2007b) also requires SIPs to comment on standards, achievement, leadership and management, capacity to improve, progress and, significantly, to give a judgement on ‘school categorisation’ that takes account of the LA’s policy. This latter requirement emphasises the character of the SIP as a LA agent carrying out a monitoring role.

questioned the usefulness of the SEF process is an example of a deeply

ADDRESSING THE KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The strength of this study lies in that it gave a voice to a group of

By examining how the relationship has been practised according to the headteachers who participated in this study we can see, using Gray (1985) *et al*'s model, how it has worked and how they feel.

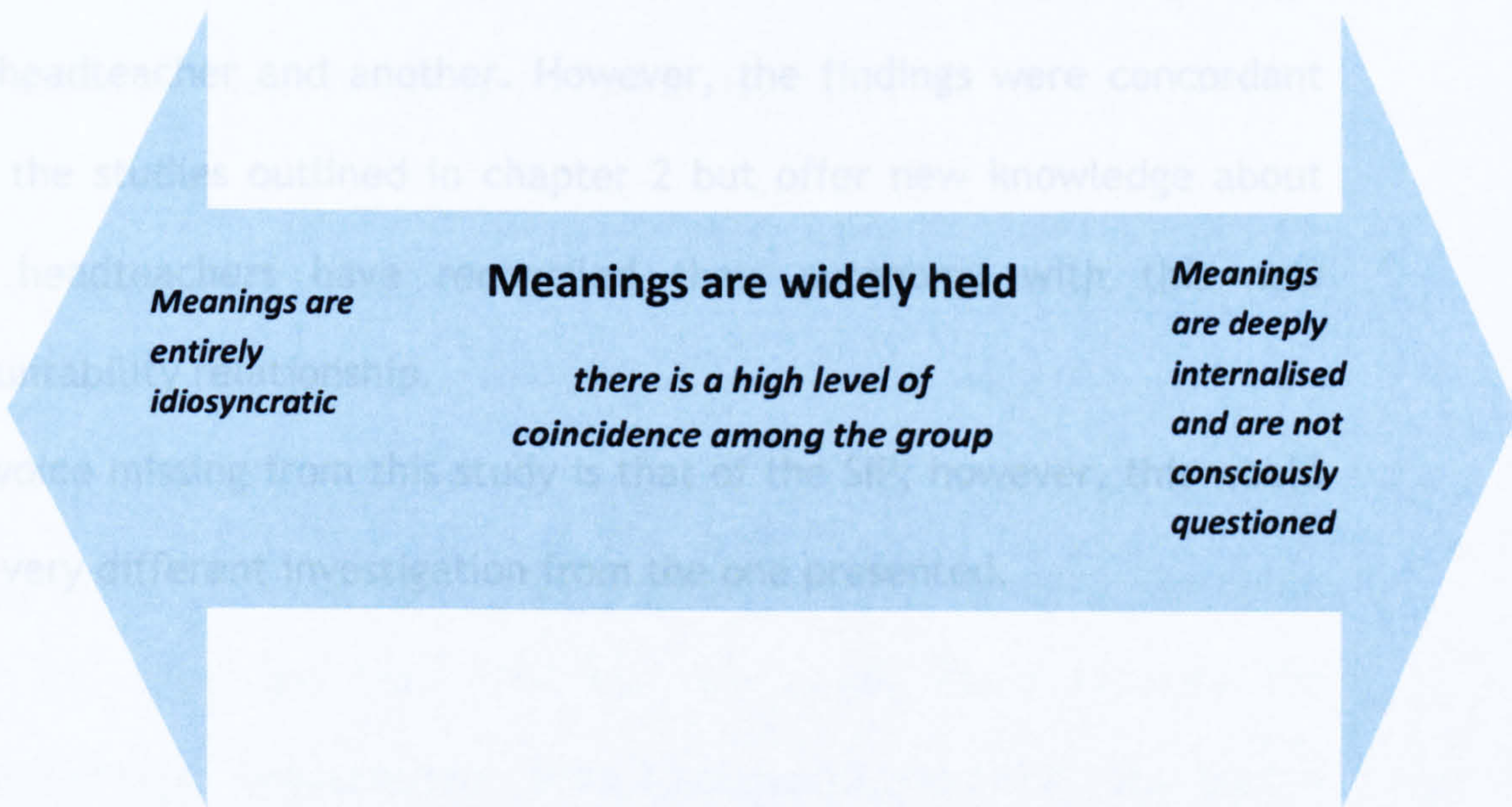


Figure 5.1 A diagram to illustrate the continuum of meaning, from Gray *et al* (1985).

The literature suggested that organisations behave in ways that resist

Some of the views expressed were idiosyncratic in that they were particular to the individual, in other cases there was a high level of congruence across the sample and some views were deeply internalised to appear custom and practice. All the headteachers completed the SEF; an idiosyncratic example might be where a headteacher presented self-evaluation in another way. However, that none of the headteachers

questioned the usefulness of the SEF process is an example of a deeply internalised meaning that is shared across the sample.

The strength of this study lies in that it gave a voice to a group of headteachers who offered frank accounts of meetings with their SIP and explained how the experience worked and how it made them feel. It is possible that accounts, as exemplified in Appendix H, were more candid than might otherwise be expected because conversations were between one headteacher and another. However, the findings were concordant with the studies outlined in chapter 2 but offer new knowledge about how headteachers have reconciled their autonomy with this new accountability relationship.

The voice missing from this study is that of the SIP; however, this would be a very different investigation from the one presented.

KRQ 1: What expectations do headteachers have about their relationship with their SIP?

The literature suggested that organisations behave in ways that resist attempts to make them change (Chapman,2003). A new relationship raises questions of trust and headteachers will find what Bottery (2003) describes as the ‘threshold point’ on a continuum from complete trust to complete distrust. Macbeath (2004) develops this further, citing Van Leeuw’s ‘me-too-you-too’ principle (2001), asserting that without this principle, calculative trust (Bottery,2003) replaces professional trust.

Early encounters are likely to be characterised by examples of calculative trust.

The literature on autonomy and accountability is pertinent at this early stage in that it suggests a link between the two (Smithers and Robinson,2007); that greater autonomy is associated with increased accountability (Bracci,2009) but the latter is associated with Hargreaves' intensification thesis (Hargreaves,1994,p.117-120).

The questionnaire survey revealed a high level of ambivalence in the early phase: the majority of responses were to express 'no opinion'. Questions were raised about the credibility of the SIP and the persons' ability to offer both support and challenge. Some raised questions about trust and expressed fears that the relationship could increase the vulnerability of headteachers. More idiosyncratic was the view that 'I don't need a SIP' because of experience, competence or a presumed intellectual superiority.

LAs gave little preparatory help to headteachers; however, given the autonomous stance taken by headteachers, there was little expectation that this would be otherwise. There was no sense of the LA supporting the headteacher, rather the LA acting as the agent of government policy by deploying the SIP.

The most widely held view was that headteachers believed that they could and should manage the relationship. The questionnaires and first interviews suggested concerns about the increase in workload, as a proxy for accountability concerns; this is concordant with Hargreaves' intensification thesis (1994,p.117-120). There was very little questioning of the principle of accountability and the inevitability of judgement. Ideas of autonomy are well embedded in that headteachers do not believe that someone can require them to do something they do not wish to do (this is Hall *et al's* (2007) accountability *focus*). Headteachers have no doubt that they will be held accountable for their actions and school outcomes.(Hall *et al's* (2007) accountability *salience*).

Headteachers expected the relationship to be one focused on school improvement and hoped for a dialogue with someone whom they could trust.

KRQ2: How do headteachers describe the relationship with their SIP during the first two years of implementations?

The characters in the study each tell a story about their perceptions and expectations; their stories are pertinent to a general discussion as with any legislation there will be a spectrum of compliance and participation. This reflects both the personal nature of leadership (Harris (2006) and Crawford (2009)) as well as the individual attempts made to resist change (Chapman, 2003).As LAs have their own policies, this in itself introduces variation.

The SIP was introduced as a 'critical professional friend' (DfES,2006a,p.19). The literature suggested synonyms for this relationship including that of a 'wise and trusted professional friend' (MRC,2007), mentor, adviser and coach. A continuum from professional friend to professional critic exposed the two elements of the relationship, how it works and how it feels. Procedures are important because they are the way that accountability is exercised; feelings matter because school leadership is a 'very personal responsibility' (Crawford,2009,p.5). Bringing these together is important because of the 'personal and professional tensions facing those in leadership positions' (Harris,2006,p.417).

How it works

The amount of time that SIPs spend with headteachers varies considerably; some SIPs spent nine hours in the school with the highest being five full days per year. The NRwS has led to greater accountability and intensification. In all cases, responsibility for initiating meetings fell to the SIP; at the extreme, some headteachers only met at their SIP's insistence. In keeping with the SIP brief, in year one there was evidence of the meetings following a broadly similar agenda; this was rarely the case in year two.

In the first phase, the agenda followed that suggested in the SIP brief (DfES,2005e); subsequently meetings were characterised by an assertion of the headteacher's priorities. All shared their SEF with the SIP and were unquestioning of the principle that the SIP should challenge their judgements. There was a sense that 'this is what we have to do'; all produced a SEF, without questioning its usefulness and no alternative was used. By producing a SEF, the headteacher is complying with expectations but it is also one way for a headteacher to manage accountability and maintain autonomy.

The guidance for SIPs is that they should challenge the school's self-evaluation and there is therefore a tacit assumption that every school will produce a SEF. Each spoke about feedback on their SEF from the SIP and the act of giving the SEF to the SIP has become a compliant act in accountability. There are examples where the SEF was reviewed and judgements changed as result of feedback from the SIP. In some cases the revision was to a more favourable judgement (i.e. good to outstanding) but in others the rating was changed from good to satisfactory. All made the suggested changes. When these changes were supported by an Ofsted judgement then this increased the credibility and satisfaction with the SIP.

Whilst this represents an act of cooperation, it also is pragmatic given that the SEF is the starting point for an Ofsted inspection. A school changing its SEF ratings could point to the SIP if challenged.

What began as a more idiosyncratic approach to SIP management was the deployment of the SIP by the headteacher to perform school improvement work and acting as a functionary of the headteacher. This made the SIP more acceptable to some, particularly those who had stated that they did not need one, but only on their terms. Some headteachers readily acknowledged the role that their SIP played; others presented a contradictory position where they denied the influence yet described changes as a result of the SIP's interventions. As the relationship developed, there was evidence of SIP activity including working with members of the leadership team, interviewing for senior staff and conducting lesson observations. None of these are part of the SIP brief but the effect was to reinforce the SIP as a functionary of the headteacher rather than greater challenge.

How it feels

Some headteachers were scathing about their SIP; in one case the headteacher researched the profile of the SIP and made judgements about the person before they arrived. Where the SIP was a serving headteacher early assumptions were formed using Ofsted reports on the SIP's school. Any shortcomings in the effectiveness of these SIPs was treated more benignly than those where the SIP had a LA role.

Headteachers saw the SIP in terms of what they could do practically and came to describe the person as 'my SIP' in the same way that they talk of 'my staff' and 'my school'. This suggests both an acceptance of the role of the SIP, as they defined it, but also an internalisation of the work of the SIP into that of the school as little distinction was made with this relationship and others.

One headteacher was positive about the SIP relationship and acknowledged that he felt embarrassed because he was unable to answer her questions. He spoke of a 're-prioritisation' as a result and the SIP acting to moderate judgments. There was no rancour, simply an admission of the omission that the SIP had identified. His relationship with the SIP developed by their openly discussing the issues of accountability although it became problematic when the SIP worked to the LA agenda (in terms of the annual report to governors) and pointed to weaknesses in the brokering of support role that SIPs have. Although positive about the relationship, this headteacher expressed concerns about the long term benefits of working with the same person because they would become increasingly complicit in the school's progress.

In contrast, a second headteacher said he needed to 'get along with' his SIP and took responsibility for developing the relationship. He commented that as the SIP relaxed and grew into the role their relationship improved. He believed that his SIP had come to appreciate and understand the context of the school. Over this period, the school

became part of the National Challenge strategy; the SIP had not raised concerns with either the governors or the LA and there was no suggestion from this headteacher that the SIP would be sanctioned.

The role of the SIP as the surrogate for accountability might suggest that over the two years there would be evidence of a headteacher being sanctioned as a result of SIP activity. In the context of declining CVA¹⁷, one headteacher used her SIP to argue her case with the vice-chair of governors. Whilst a decline in CVA and being part of the National Challenge strategy might not necessarily require headteacher sanction, there was no evidence that the SIP work had been the trigger for action and he had actively provided support for her position. A newly appointed headteacher offered a different story with his SIP acting in a superordinate position and actively setting targets for him. This approach was welcomed and encouraged by him as he worked in a challenging context— he valued the role that she adopted but this position also provided him with some degree of protection from other agencies, including the LA.

At the end of year one headteachers expressed some confidence in the relationship and looked forward to working with the SIP as part of the school team. Few saw the relationship in accountability terms; some were suspicious of the role, expressing concerns about the relationship

¹⁷ Contextualised Value Added

with the LA and the abilities of the SIPs to challenge. All were able to identify a change in the relationship at the end of year two either because of spending time together or increased understanding of contextual factors.

KRQ3: What do headteachers accounts tell us about their perceptions of partnership?

One headteacher went to considerable lengths to deny any influence that the SIP had on her work. Some said they did not need a SIP but acknowledged the impact that the SIP had on their work. One headteacher saw the SIP as a superordinate who set him targets and actively monitored his performance in the manner of a line manager. The literature on partnership draws attention to a relationship where risks are *shared* and characterised by *shared* beliefs and behaviours (Empson,2006).

Most perceptions of the SIP relationship were positive and focused on school improvement and this positive response was mostly associated with those SIPs who are also serving headteachers. The expectation of meetings was of a professional dialogue and whilst agreeing with the notions of partnership headteachers used the relationship to manage accountability relationships, both with the LA and governors. Rarely was the relationship seen as a reciprocal one. Perhaps if any of the headteachers had experienced significant conflict with the SIP or the SIP

had raised concerns, then the expression of partnership would have been less positive.

During the period of the study there was a critical incident that changed or confirmed the partnership relationship. This was a feature of all of the accounts; SIPs helped headteachers begin competency procedures, supported the headteacher in meetings with governors and acted as a member of the leadership team. In some cases this led to a more trusting relationship (in that the headteacher was more open with the SIP) or the headteacher trusted the SIP to work under their direction.

Whilst the notion of shared risks was absent from headteachers' analysis of the relationship, the idea of shared beliefs was present in that SIPs did go, as David described, 'off the agenda' and provided support to headteachers. Partnership was in greater evidence from SIPs than headteachers. No one refused to meet with their SIP; most described their SIP as professionally credible but always as an extension of other accountability relationships.

KRQ4: What do headteacher accounts tell us about their perceptions of autonomy?

Drawing on the literature (Thomson (2006), MRC (2007)) we might expect that the introduction of a 'partner' would help to address the feelings of professional isolation— particularly if the SIP is a serving headteacher. The literature suggests that resentment might be an observable response

to the new relationship (Costa and Kallick (1993), Sang Yong Tom and Zhaoli (2004)). The response of headteachers evidences feelings of resentment but also others who welcome the opportunity to discuss school improvement. Headteachers in this study believe that whatever the process, they know 'their' school and so will be able to manage the relationship: headteachers did not regard the SIP as a threat to their autonomy because they felt confident to control the activity.

Whilst the headteacher who saw his SIP as a superordinate and those who saw the SIP entirely in a monitoring role are idiosyncratic views, more widely, there was a weak link between greater accountability and increased autonomy. Phrases such as 'it's me who has to decide because I'm the head' were not unusual. Few saw the SIP as a threat to their autonomy, even in those schools in the National Challenge, subject to increased monitoring. Nor did they challenge that this was what they had to do. However, in those schools that had been either in special measures, National Challenge or led by inexperienced headteachers facing challenging circumstances, the assumed role of the SIP as a tutor was something that was unquestioned by those headteachers.

KRQ5: What do headteacher accounts tell us about their perceptions of accountability?

The SIP/headteacher relationship was announced as a new dimension in educational accountability. The SIP's focus is on how well the school is

doing, principally measured by GCSE benchmark¹⁸ outcomes for children. The accountability link that characterises the SIP relationship is reinforced by the SIP's accountability to the LA and the LA's accountability to the DCSF.

Accountability is a very important aspect of headteachers' responsibilities and it figured largely in interviews in this study. Headteachers' awareness of their accountability is founded in the personal and professional costs of poor school performance. The reputations of the headteacher and of the school are inextricably linked and Horner (2002) explains that in 'markets in which customers can only assess the quality of a seller's product by purchasing it and consuming it ...the seller's reputation for quality becomes a valuable asset' (p.622). Reputations are built with stakeholders but also with peers. Where SIPs are serving headteachers this brings together the procedural accountability to the LA and the informal accountability to peers. Meetings with the SIP that replaced those with LA acted as a further 'reminder' of headteacher accountability principally because of the focus on data, school improvement and student outcomes. Where the meetings were in addition to LA meetings, this increased accountability concerns.

¹⁸ The 'benchmark' outcomes include the percentage of children achieving 5 or more A*-C passes at GCSE. During the course of this study the benchmark outcome changed to 5 or more A*-C passes at GCSE including mathematics and English.

We would expect that the introduction of a new person will bring about a change in a relationship. The response of headteachers to these changes is primarily to heighten sensitivity to accountability.

EMERGING THEMES FROM THE STUDY

The main question in this study was how headteachers reconciled their autonomy with the accountability imposed on them by the SIP relationship. The key research questions were used to explore this question. The literature raised questions about autonomy, accountability and partnership. From this study, two themes have emerged. Firstly the link between greater autonomy and increased accountability and secondly, the extent to which the NRwS is truly about 'intelligent accountability' expressed through partnership (Miliband (2004), ASCL (2004), Hopkins (2009)).

Do headteachers feel they have greater autonomy and increased accountability?

Headteachers are more accountable and feel more accountable; there is no evidence from this study that they feel more autonomous or indeed link greater autonomy with increased accountability. They have used their perceived autonomy in that they have controlled the SIP relationship to a majority extent and no-one has told them to do otherwise. This is consistent with Engelhardt's view that 'autonomy is

the ground of accountability' (2001,p.286), then headteachers will make 'preferences in action' (Oshana,2002,p.273) to assert their autonomy. Occasionally the response is to see the SIP in a superordinate relationship. Some manage this accountability— whether through acquiescence, pragmatism or desperation— by taking the advice offered by the SIP and doing what is suggested. One consequence, that was noted by headteachers, is that the subsequent challenge that the SIP is able to offer is inhibited.

Headteachers expressed some ambivalence towards SIPs in the initial phase; for some the support from a serving head came as a welcome surprise, for others continuation of previous arrangements and in other cases a challenge that brought about a sharper focus on areas for improvement. That SIPs have yet to engage with governors in any consistent way together with a wide variation of time and activity in schools suggests a prevailing influence of the headteacher on SIP activity.

Does the NRwS represent a new accountability relationship?

The aims of the NRwS (DfES,2005a,p.4) represent an attempt to bring about improvement through a local system of control based on a centralist model. The SEF is a good example. It has moved from being good practice to an accountability device. This is suggested in the SIP brief where the trigger for concern has changed from the school not recognising significant underperformance to failing to address significant

underperformance and underlined further by changes in the Ofsted framework in 2009: the published guidance states that there ‘will be no expectation that schools will complete...the new SEF before September’ (Ofsted,2009), with the expectation that schools will complete a SEF. The NRwS refers to ‘rigorous self-evaluation’ and this has been translated into a major activity where the SEF is assessed by the SIP. When headteachers provide the SIP with their SEF it is both an act of compliance but also a means to manage accountability.

The NRwS aims to give people the opportunity to participate in system leadership. Whilst this study was being carried out there was a movement from the idea of a professionally credible critical friend to a monitoring and accountability relationship. The question arises, to what extent is monitoring and accountability a feature of system leadership and how the skills of ‘talented school leaders’ are being used? Some headteachers have managed the accountability relationship by asking SIPs to undertake a range of tasks and act as members of the leadership team, thereby affecting the level and degree of challenge offered.

Key to the NRwS is the ‘single conversation’ and schools were told that there would be an end to multiple relationships and a wide range of initiatives. The evidence is that brokerage of support works best where LAs have remodelled to take account of the new relationship but otherwise, headteachers are still engaged in a range of discussions to broker the support for themselves.

LOOKING FORWARD

For headteachers, having a SIP is about greater accountability; the focus of the SIP is to provide support and challenge for the key processes in school improvement. The SIP reports to the governors and the LA. This presents itself as a simple context characterised by stability and clear cause-and-effect relationships. The ‘answers’, in terms of school improvement at the individual level and at a system level, present themselves as self-evident and undisputed; as such they need a straightforward management and monitoring to bring about the desired outcomes. However, Snowden and Boone (2007) point to the problems that can arise when complex issues are treated as if they are simple; the most obvious being that ‘people are blinded to new ways of thinking by the perspectives they acquired through past experience, training and success’ (p.70). The reliance on ‘people who really know the business of school improvement’ (DfES, 2006a, p.3) is countered by the warning implicit in the case-study approach critiqued by Levin (2006). SIPs are evaluating school improvement through their own experience and expertise; where the headteacher and SIP are matched according to experience and context (i.e. a more experienced head acts as a SIP to a less experienced head) this encourages the headteacher to learn from the SIP, rather than the SIP challenging the headteacher. Similarly, where SIPs are making suggestions rather than using consultancy skills,

this leads to a lack of challenge because the ideas are the SIP's rather than the headteachers.

The initial list of tasks for the SIP expressed a broader role than the accountability relationship that has emerged over the course of this study. Later DCSF documents have phrased the SIP brief in functional terms and external evaluations have indicated that it is effective and provides good quality challenge to headteachers and schools. Whilst in policy terms the role of autonomous self-improving schools supported and challenged by a professionally credible critical friend remains, the context is not simple.

One of the headteachers in the study regularly raises the question about the role of the SIP; others less often. The widely held view is that the support and monitoring roles are incompatible. Harris (2008) comments that in virtually every industrialised democracy 'the idea of accountability for performance has a firm grip on education policy' (p.19). She describes the accountability process as being focused on the individual performance that fails to take account of the social and economic factors pervasive to all contexts— of course a number of the relationships in this study changed when, according to the headteacher, the SIP started to understand these factors.

Accountability looks set to continue to be a significant feature of the headteacher's lot. According to Harris (2008), it takes headteachers away from classroom matters— this is the place where school

improvement is effected and the most effective principals are characterised by 'the performance of leadership tasks that are positively connected to student achievements' (Krüger *et al*,2007,p.2) and who 'engage in activities directly affecting the quality of teaching and learning' (Gold *et al*,2003,p.19).

The role of the SIP is to 'monitor schools' performance' (DCSF,2009a,p.62). Some of the headteachers thought the 'professional critical friend' was perfect to describe the relationship with their SIP; it did not lead to intensification (Hargreaves,1994,p.117-120). The monitoring and accountability function was less obvious as the headteacher was comfortable in being able to manage the relationship. Concerns about accountability were expressed more about the system than about the individual. With the SIPs becoming more powerful, as the DCSF (2009a) anticipates, the phrase 'professional critical friend' no longer features. The phrase 'Greater accountability will lead to higher standards' (DCSF,2009b) confirms that the grip that accountability has on the school system is set to continue.

Freedom to combine the roles of leading professional and chief executive has given headteachers greater autonomy than before. The SEF, as the starting point for an Ofsted inspection, is an example of the greater autonomy and increased accountability. The increase in accountability brought about by the deployment of SIPs is the price that central government has exacted: that headteachers manage the monitoring and accountability demands by controlling the activity of the

SIP ensures that the leadership and management of schools remains in the hands of the headteacher.

Areas for further research

This study has focused on the perceptions and expectations of secondary headteachers. There are a number of aspects of this research that would provide fruitful questions for other projects and these include the perceptions of SIPs and indeed governors. A further study might examine the headteacher, SIP and chair of governors as they go through the school improvement cycle and in this way it would be possible to triangulate within the research study. Examining the impact of SIPs with reference to changes in performance measures (for example GCSE outcomes and CVA) would also be interesting.

A New Government

The NRwS was Labour policy. It remains to be seen whether SIPs are consigned to education history or become, in the 2010 Coalition Government, part of the ‘proper national framework of accountability’ (Gove,2010) where there is a ‘transparent publication of academic performance on a school-by-school basis’ and a movement away from a system where

Ministers decreased school autonomy, tried to drive improvement through bureaucratic compliance, complicated the inspection

regime and simultaneously weakened and complicated our system of accountability.

Gove(2010)

The influences are the school systems of America, Canada, Singapore, Sweden and Finland. Selecting elements of a country's policies is politically attractive but the danger is highlighted thus:

Due to their complexity, none of the different interpretations of the data... can fully explain the origin and nature of school autonomy policies..... the degree of political will attached to these policies resulted from an intermingling of various structural factors and circumstances.....and, in addition, the political opportunities which prompted governments to adopt policies which would lead to such profound changes in schools.

Eurydice (2007)

What is clear at this stage is that the Coalition Government sees accountability as being an essential element to bring about school improvement; the means is autonomy from LA control by granting powers to those headteachers leading schools with high levels of attainment. Gove acknowledges that headteachers improve their schools fastest and most effectively by working with other heads that have been on that journey. This is not incompatible with the SIP brief nor the

experience of some of the headteachers in this study; one headteacher commented that his SIP was:

a bit further along the road in terms of progress— but this means I can learn from him because he's credible in my eyes.

But of course, as David pointed out:

SIPs, as they get closer— it's harder for them to take the inspectorial role and position. They have to keep coming back— and they become more empathetic.

Learning from others, where the role moves from critical friend and mentor to one with a power relationship, becomes problematic and headteachers found ways to manage the accountability and their autonomy. That is the outcome of the new relationship.

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Appendices

Appendix A	Distribution of schools in the third wave by government area
Appendix B	Trial Questionnaire
Appendix C	Final Questionnaire
Appendix D	Follow-up semi-structured interviews in June/July 2006
Appendix E	Semi-structured interviews at the end of year one (with email attachment)
Appendix F	Semi-structured interviews at the end of year two (with email attachment)
Appendix G	Coding of responses from Year 1 Semi-Structured Interviews
Appendix H	Transcript of Semi structured interview 1: date 14 June 2007 and Semi structured interview 2: date 16 June 2008
Appendix I	Thematic map from data analysis
Appendix J	A table summarising the school information about the headteachers

Appendix A

Table to show distribution of schools in the third wave by government area

Area	Number of LAs	Schools
East	8	283
East Midlands	6	221
London	20	255
North East	5	79
North West	17	352
South East	12	275
South West	9	175
West Midlands	10	273
Yorkshire and Humberside	7	120
Total	94	2033

Appendix B

Questionnaire (trial)

1. How long have you been a headteacher

Less than 1 year	More than 1 and less than 3 years	More than 3 and less than 7 years	More than 7 and less than 10 years	10+ years

2. How many students in your school

3. How many teachers at your school

4. How would you describe the purpose of the School Improvement Partner implementation (please rank order these as appropriate from 1 to 6, 1 being the most important for you)

To build the capacity of schools to improve	
To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform	
To operate an intelligent accountability framework that is rigorous and has a lighter touch	
To enable schools to access the support they need to improve	
To improve data systems	
To secure better alignment between schools' priorities and the	

priorities of local and central government	
None of these (please describe)	

5. How has your LA prepared you for the visit of your SIP (please tick all that apply)

held conferences and other meetings	
written communication only	
LA has not helped me to prepare	
I didn't know we were in the third wave	
I didn't know I would be visited by a SIP this school year	

6. Are you an accredited SIP

Yes	No	Awaiting accreditation

7. Do you intend to seek accreditation as a SIP

Yes	No

If no, please say why

8. Do you know who your SIP will be?

Yes	No

9. Is your SIP a *(please tick)*

headteacher from another LA	
LA officer from your own LA	
LA officer from another LA	
Independent consultant	

10. Thinking about the first visit of your SIP, do you think that it will be
(please tick all that apply)

a professional dialogue with someone you can trust	
a meeting that will help me to improve my school	
an irrelevance to your work	
an unwelcome addition to your workload	
no opinion	

11. Overall, how do you feel about the SIP programme (for each statement please indicate whether your opinion)

	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
Content because I understand the process			
Content because I am confident that I know my school			
Content because I think the programme will be beneficial to me and my school			
Content because it will be better than what has gone before			
Discontent because I don't have time to prepare for these meetings			
Discontent because I don't think my assigned SIP will be able to provide me with the challenge and support I need			
Discontent because I was happy with the LA monitoring process			
Discontent because I don't know enough about what will happen			

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return to smtranter@fitzharrys.oxon.sch.uk by 30 June 2006

Appendix C

Questionnaire

1. How long have you been a headteacher?

Less than 1 year	More than 1 and less than 3 years	More than 3 and less than 7 years	More than 7 and less than 10 years	10+ years

2. How many students in your school

3. How many teachers at your school

4. How would you describe the purpose of the School Improvement Partner implementation (please rank order these as appropriate from 1 to 6, 1 being the most important for you)

To build the capacity of schools to improve	
To enable talented school leaders to play a wider part in system-wide reform	
To increase headteacher accountability	
To enable schools to access the support they need to improve	
To improve data systems	
To secure better alignment between schools' priorities and the priorities of local and central government	

5. How has the LA prepared you for the visit of your SIP (please tick all that apply)

held conferences and other meetings	
written communication only	
LA has not helped me to prepare	
I didn't know we were in the third wave	
I didn't know I would be visited by a SIP this school year	

6. Are you an accredited SIP?

Yes	No	Awaiting accreditation

7. Do you intend to seek accreditation as a SIP?

Yes	No

If no, please say why

8. Do you know who your SIP will be?

Yes	No

9. Is your SIP a *(please tick)*

headteacher from another LA	
Xshire officer	
LA officer from another LA	
Independent consultant	

10. Thinking about the first visit of your SIP, do you think that it will be *(please tick all that apply?)*

a professional dialogue with someone you can trust	
a meeting that will help me to improve my school	
an irrelevance to your work	
an unwelcome addition to your workload	
no opinion	

11. Overall, how do you feel about the SIP programme (for each statement please indicate whether your opinion)

	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
Content because I understand the process			
Content because I am confident that I know my school			
Content because I think the programme will be beneficial to me and my school			
Content because it will be better than what has gone before			
Discontent because I don't have time to prepare for these meetings			

Discontent because I don't think my assigned SIP will be able to provide me with the challenge and support I need			
Discontent because I was happy with the LA monitoring process			
Discontent because I don't know enough about what will happen			

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return to smtranter@fitzharrys.oxon.sch.uk by 30 September 2006

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview schedule

Name of interviewee:

Date of interview:

Anonymity, Change of name, Explain the research- is the interviewee happy to be recorded?

1. Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Tell me how you decided which one of the statements about the purpose of the SIP was the most important
2. Could you tell me why you decided on X as the lowest ranked
3. How would you rate the preparation and information provided by the LA
4. What kind of information would you like to have been given

5. What do you know about the SIP accreditation process
6. Why did you decide to be/not to be a SIP
7. What would need to happen before you would consider becoming a SIP
8. When you meet your SIP what will your agenda be
9. What are your expectations of the SIP meetings

Appendix E

Email sent to headteacher respondents in May 2007

Dear Name

You may recall that in September 2006 you completed a questionnaire for me on the implementation of the School Improvement Partner relationship. Thank you once again for returning the questionnaire. Last year you very kindly agreed to talk to me about how your relationship with your SIP had developed during the first year of the NRwS. I am researching the impact of the SIP as part of a doctorate looking at the NRwS and looking at the impact of SIPs on the leadership of secondary schools.

If it is still possible, I will ask my PA to contact you during the next week to arrange a telephone interview- about 30 minutes should suffice.

When I call, I would like to ask you about your impressions of the SIP, how your SIP has worked with you, the benefits of working in this way and any problems that you may have experienced. I'd like to conclude by asking you how you feel the year has gone working with your SIP.

I will ask you if I can record our conversation so that I can transcribe it later and give you my fullest attention. Your comments will be anonymised and you are welcome to a copy of the transcribed interview, if you wish.

I look forward to speaking to you soon

Best wishes

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Biographical details

Name:

School:

Phone number:

Size of school:

Number of years as a headteacher:

Are you a SIP?

Anonymity, Change of name, Explain the research- is the interviewee happy to be recorded?

A: How the relationship has worked in practice (*i.e. how many times have they met, who has been there, how are the outcomes recorded*)

I. How many times have you met with your SIP since September 2006? There is guidance on how much time is allocated to a school (five days) and although there may be other forms of contact (i.e. email and telephone) the focus for the interviews was the face to face meetings.

II. Describe the first meeting with your SIP.

III. Describe subsequent meetings with your SIP- duration, venue, attendees etc. The purpose in asking this question was to explore how the

relationship develops and how the headteacher is managing the meetings.

- IV. What preparation do you do for these meetings? *The intention in this question is to find out if the agenda for meetings is agreed, negotiated or determined by the LA, the SIP or the headteacher.*
- V. How are the outcomes of the meetings recorded - *what happens to these records.*

B: Perceptions of the relationship

- I. How was your SIP allocated to you? *The SIP is allocated to the school by the LA. LA staff have access to 'pen portraits' written by the SIP detailing their relevant experience. Many LAs involved headteachers in the recruitment and deployment activity.*
- II. How did you feel about the allocation?
- III. Is your SIP a serving headteacher- does this matter to you. *The NRWS has a target of 70-80% of SIPs should have recent and relevant headship experience. This question is designed to find out whether this is an important factor in the relationship.*

IV. The NRwS says the SIP is a 'professionally credible critical friend'- what is your response to this?

C: What impact has it had?

I. In your view has the work with your SIP impacted on your practice? (e.g. target setting, PM)

II. How satisfied are you with your SIP- if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both

Appendix F

Email sent to headteacher respondents in May 2008

Dear Name

Last year you very kindly agreed to talk to me about how your relationship with your SIP had developed during the first year of the NRwS. I am researching the impact of the SIP as part of a doctorate looking at the NRwS. At the conclusion of our telephone discussion you agreed for me to contact you again for a further discussion.

I hope that you are happy for my PA to contact you to arrange a telephone discussion on your relationship with your SIP. The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes and I am interested to learn from you:

- Have you continued to work with the same SIP this year- if there has been a change, what led to this new relationship?
- What activities has the SIP engaged in whilst at your school?
- How has the SIP engaged with governors?
- How has the relationship with your SIP changed this year?
- How you feel that the relationship has worked out.

As last year, I will ask you if I can record our conversation so that I can transcribe it later and give you my fullest attention. Your comments will be anonymised and you are welcome to a copy of the transcribed interview, if you wish.

I will ask XX, my PA to contact you after the half term break to arrange for a discussion.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Biographical details

Name:

School:

Phone number:

Size of school:

Number of years as a headteacher:

Are you a SIP?

Anonymity, Change of name, Explain the research- is the interviewee happy to be recorded?

A: How the relationship has worked in practice (*i.e. how many times have they met, who has been there, how are the outcomes recorded*)

I. Have you continued to work with the same SIP this year- if there has been a change, what led to this new relationship

II. What activities has the SIP engaged with whilst at your school

III. How has the SIP engaged with governors

B: Perceptions of the relationship

- I. How has the relationship with your SIP changed this year?
- II. How did you feel that the relationship has worked out?

C: What impact has it had?

- I. In your view has the work with your SIP impacted on your practice?
(e.g. target setting, PM)
- II. How satisfied are you with your SIP- if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both

Appendix G

Responses from Year 1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Key

Andrea

Angela

Anna

Candace

Clarissa

David

Jane

Jacob

Janis

Louise

Semi structured interviews (June 2007)		Responses compiled using the first round of statements from the semi structured interviews Corrections to the text were made for the thesis text.
9. What preparation do you do for these meetings?		
10. How are the outcomes of the meetings recorded – what happens to these records?		
11. How satisfied are you with your life? If you could choose what you (couldn't)		

Mark		
Rodger		
Steve		
Sally		
Theo		
Researcher's Questions		
Key research question	Semi structured interviews (June 2007)	Responses compiled using the first trawl of statements from the semi-structured interviews. Corrections to the text were made for the thesis text.
KR1:How do English secondary headteachers perceive their accountability	<p>9. What preparation do you do for these meetings?</p> <p>10. How are the outcomes of the meetings recorded – what happens to these records</p> <p>12. How satisfied are you with your SIP- if you could choose would you continue</p>	<p>He has been very efficient; he produces excellent draft reviews/reports. In my own SIPing, I try within a week to get the documents back- and I'm glad he's like me.</p> <p>In an ideal world, knowing my school and my work_ I could do without both of them. But I see the value of them. Maybe it should be light touch- do they need the extra layer of paperwork. It should be inversely proportional to what the school's capacity is.</p> <p>Principally by visit notes- he sends them to me before they go to the LA</p>

	<p>with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both</p>	<p>By return, a record of the meeting that is spot-on accurate. He gets back to me very quickly – he is very efficient. I have never had to change anything.</p> <p>She takes notes and sends me a copy – I make factual and she sends them back. I have a supportive Chair of Governors – shared with governors.</p> <p>We agree a joint statement – I correct any inaccuracies. She came to present to Governors but it was a bit of a dash, she hadn't corrected some points – can you change them?</p> <p>He does notes of visits and they have been really useful. I can go back – refer. Chair of Governors sees the notes but not the whole body.</p> <p>He sends a memo – decisions made and topics discussed and these are passed to Governors. <i>Contact with the LA?</i> Phil is my main contact. We have clusters in Kent – it's debatable if they work or not.</p> <p>He records for the LA. I think I get a copy but I am not sure.</p>
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<p> KP2: How do English secondary headteachers perceive their autonomy </p>	
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<p> 3. How was your SIP allocated to you? 4. How did you feel about the allocation? 11. In your view has this work with your SIP impacted on your practice? (e.g. target setting, FSW) 12. How satisfied are you with your SIP- if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both? </p>	
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<p> He records those. I have also filled forms in and I sign them when I am happy with them. They go to the LA because they pay him. The SIP writes the notes – these went into the LA – before they came to me. They get shared with the Chair of Governors. It's turning out as I thought. The SIP has definitely been 'got at' by the LA. It's so obvious- he's making things very difficult for me in the same way that the LA did before. He doesn't understand what it's like in my school- and he never will- he hasn't been a head. We talk about things at the meeting but the notes of visit give a very different tone. Well, he records the meetings for the LA- but, quite frankly, they are so anodyne and full of jargon that I don't read them- I just glance at them to make sure that there's nothing stupid and then they get filed. </p>	
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<p>KR2:How do English secondary headteachers perceive their autonomy</p>	<p>3. How was your SIP allocated to you</p> <p>4. How did you feel about the allocation</p> <p>11. In your view has the work with your SIP impacted on your practice? (e.g. target setting, PM)</p> <p>12. How satisfied are you with your SIP- if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both</p>	<p>I think it is- I've had good LA advice- but someone who knows what it's like to sit in that chair- they don't understand ultimate responsibility and the pressures.</p> <p>I wouldn't say that it has. I've been a head of 11 years; you know what to do- the SIP hasn't given me ideas. Having someone who is a credible current head who affirms your practice- we have really good discussions- there are ideas that have come out that I take on board.</p> <p>No because the allocations were made for us. There was an opportunity to say something but we had other things to do.</p> <p>It has been quite useful because there is a degree of trust- it tends to be a discussion between us two.</p> <p>In a sense, it feels like the old programme because it's the same bloke. It has been a seamless transition. I don't notice any difference. Having a SIP is a sensible way of doing it. There is an inherent danger of it being just one person. It hinges on the quality of that person- not going native, not ringing alarm bells or some clash of personality who is making a nuisance of themselves. I'm very attracted to this- it feels much more effective because they invest more time. You can't play games with your SIP- it seems a better way to do things. It's been a very difficult year for us and he's really helped.</p> <p>I wonder if the SIP system can be sustained. It's a simple straightforward approach to accountability.</p> <p>We made the decision to have the same SIP for all the Bromley schools – it allowed the SIP to have that overview.</p>
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16 schools – one SIP for 14 schools and someone for the other two. It was done in consultation with Heads. We have had quite a bit of say in who we had so that helped to produce professional confidence.

We were somewhat cynical. The evaluation I did; it's a useful thing. We did have an Ofsted inspection; his evaluation of our plan and SEF to link to ECM was fortuitous – so we were complimented on this in Ofsted.

Where I have had queries and questions he's tried to go beyond the brick wall – he's had no more success than me.

He has been a good objective assessor of our data – he hadn't come to any different conclusion but has agreed with, on analysis.

We have had good professional discussions about a range of things. It's been interesting, not entirely stimulating. It hasn't changed my conclusions because the length of time I have been in headship (14 years), I don't think anyone would have changed my thinking. The only person who has done this is Professor David Hargreaves – he is so affirming.

I've found my SIP support practical and assisting; it has acted as an audit with a bit of question asking in high places but it hasn't changed the way I work. It has strengthened the Bromley collaborative – it was the way we wanted it to be done.

I had a say in it. I was at a Head's meeting – I offered to join the interviews. It was one of the best things I did as I influenced the overall selection and influenced the person who was going to be my SIP. It was important to match the SIP experience and their philosophy. There has to be a degree of

	<p>respect – challenge from a credibility. There are ex-heads who are now advisers – some are SIP’s.</p> <p>We had a choice – she wasn’t our first choice. In the event I didn’t get who I wanted. She was the second choice – I knew the first choice.</p> <p>There was no choice – I got him because we’re a school causing concern.</p> <p>I asked for an ex-head out of area. A gentleman who has just retired. Just out of special measures. I also have experience.</p> <p>They do it on an area basis. I am in a rather peculiar position where I have my ex-deputy who is now my SIP. Before I had Jerry and he had a different perception – he brought to the discussion things I hadn’t thought of before.</p> <p>I wasn’t involved in the drawing up of the list.</p> <p>He came via the LA – he has three or four schools in the LA. I didn’t have any choice – his profile was reasonable. He was sitting in Reception and came with “What is that man doing in this school” – it’s</p>	
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Annette’s SIP. “He has taken two schools into special measures. What can he contribute to us?”

We are a school in an area of deprivation. I was acting head for two years but then became head. I have a SIP plus an LA representative and it has made it very difficult. In terms of what happened – he is a Headteacher from Coventry in a similar context. I have been to visit him in his school – and that’s good. He does a lot of talking at me but my LA monitoring officer, where we have our , and that’s been better.

We had no involvement, we had a plan from the LA but this didn’t involve headteachers. I know what’s wrong with my school and I need to be able to get on with it and talk to my staff.

The most important thing – could they get the balance between challenge and support – that was the criteria. They wouldn’t have the impact if they only talked data – they needed to have something to offer other than the analysis. Needed to have empathy but to shine light on areas of performance and challenge. How will you support the head? Otherwise they become “just someone else to deal with” . Our SIP is very incisive, very challenging but we have a dialogue. Equally, it’s good when they take something away. Deputy heads have met with the SIP

It’s true to say we’re settling down. I have a SIP who was a head for 4 years. The best will in the world, I question her credibility. Unlikely I would ask her for advice – as I have my own network and I

	<p>have real concerns about having a partner in post (I think they should be chosen). Accountability to LA, DfES – would I want to open up to that person? Taking it away from there is potential conflict in the role.</p> <p>It's gone very well. The SIP is also a headteacher in the LA but they get a lot of information about me and my school. I did a bit of digging around and found that she had a similar context, she has the same catchment. In my eyes she has credibility, she's not too removed from where I am at.</p> <p>Following on from that, the SIP brought information and we agreed what we would use. In a way, it was useful induction for me. She wasn't unwilling to ask awkward questions and give several weeks' notice. She worked with other members of the LT as it allows others to benefit. She's a critical friend because she established instantly a positive rapport. We were Ofsteded last week – the HMI was impressed with the SIP work.</p> <p>I have found it really useful as I am an acting principal. Fortunately, my SIP is an LA adviser who has been working with me as a deputy. I have found it very supportive, asking very chatty questions but not trying to catch me out.</p> <p>With Ofsted, you feel defensive but when I ask for support, e.g. the success criteria for the School Improvement Plan, then we can put the notice on the door and have quality time.</p> <p>Because of the circumstances, it was nice to have someone I knew. Particularly if it was someone you didn't know at all – this would be an issue.</p>	
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		<p>It hasn't been too painful, a reasonably positive experience. The nature of the partner has been very accommodating. It has been a comfortable year.</p> <p>I knew nothing about him. I was very tentative – I had my two deputies with me at the outset. The first meeting – the focus was performance. I hadn't had a lot of information. I had notes – he didn't highlight the differences – just the areas of agreement.</p> <p>Am I going to get on with this person? They all seem to be non-confrontational people. We worked together.</p> <p>I felt that the level of challenge will come from me. He doesn't understand my school. I've recruited people from schools in challengers – perhaps they always underestimate the level of challenge. He didn't inspire me.</p> <p>It's good but that's because I am not a HT who needs a lot of help – I have taken the school out of special measures in 4 terms – I am very self-critical and self-evaluating. I have a very strong monitoring system throughout the school. Our SEF is a very true reflection, our targets are accurate</p> <p>No, I had no say in who I had. There's been no consultation in the deployment. Relationships are very</p>
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	<p>important to me and I don't have that yet. A few less improved things and have more time. It's a set agenda.</p> <p>It could do more if the SIP were engaged in bigger decision making 1) more engaged in the Ofsted inspection, 2) reaccreditation of specialism.</p> <p>I think the concept is right but we need to do more.</p> <p>It has re-prioritised what we do. Not a radical change of direction. It has raised the priority in those areas. This is more important than we thing e.g. attainment and CVA. She encouraged us to look at CVA, KS2-D4, identify students by name and think about what we are going to do. She asks constructive questions – she seeks to test and to understand.</p> <p>No. I am telling her what we're doing. She has been impressed with what we do but she hasn't been able to suggest anything different. She suggested we should do vocational ed but we rejected that. If I initiated the discussion, I think I would have someone who could discuss issues. Paradox of the roles – if I had a problem, would I open up?</p> <p>I would be happy if I were working with someone who works in a girls' school.</p> <p>I worked in Barnet my first half term – they welcomed me. Made sure that we were welcomed. I sat with experienced people and asked advice. There was</p>
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	<p>It was open and honest – these are people who are really experienced and asked one another. They trusted one another. That trust is absolutely essential. They have tried to package it up into one conversation – we need lots of different ones.</p> <p>You have to have heads involved in the appointment of the SIP – so we get someone we can trust. It’s a problem with the role. I know if I speak to a colleague he isn’t going to speak to the Borough – but I don’t know if the SIP will do that.</p> <p>It’s good to have someone who is there. It helps me to focus on what I should be doing. Getting the strategic view.</p> <p>PM – she summarises what my impact has been and what we had agreed to do.</p> <p>PM – we talked about the targets for the following year. They met about, and with, me. That took about</p> <p>The success criteria - we have talked it through. We were able to clarify it using the Ofsted criteria. This changed the way I did the plan. With the SEF I got so bogged down with it – going through it and saying “what if” and “so what” has really helped.</p> <p>Why are you doing it? – he’s asked me this and I have had to think really hard to answer that because he knows about the wide range of things we could do.</p>
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	<p>Headteacher's PM – this went reasonably well. I have uncertainty about governors' role in Head's PM. Writing a report to go to Governors.</p> <p>Gently challenging, not hammering me over the head. He's pulled me back. It's been fruitful and reflective. Perhaps there's time for compliments – where he has said</p> <p>It has given me more confidence on ways to improve. It's very difficult being a head – it's good to have someone who is there for you.</p> <p>Honestly, no. Perhaps it's sharpened in targeted setting but otherwise.</p> <p>Not a lot. That's because I have had to develop things in a particular way here. It's always nice to have someone to back you up. I can't say it's changed what I do. My relationship with the LA has changed a bit. My LA adviser and I met regularly when we were in special measures. I don't see the LA very often now. They know I am able.</p> <p>He brought home to me that some of what we do is good. My SEF is much better focused this year.</p> <p>I don't think I would want to go back to the way it was before. I don't think the LA has the capacity to</p>
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		<p>do this kind of work. I think the LA benefit to have an objective view. I still have some questions about it. The Governors made the decision to carry on with the external assessor for my PM.</p> <p>I would continue with it as it is. The feeling I get is that it's quite patchy – some people would rather go back. There's a diversity of what SIP's do – some are developmental, some are less so. Our SIP asks "Why is the target where it is?"</p> <p>I would have a proper mentoring system of heads; I would probably still have LA but high quality, high calibre people who could provide challenge.</p> <p>It wasn't great with the LA so it hasn't made that much of a difference.</p> <p>I would definitely continue with the SIP. It would be good to have five years. The data is so public there's no way that the SIP could go native – they've got to challenge.</p>
<p>KR3:What perceptions and expectations do English secondary headteachers have about the relationship with the School</p>	<p>2. How many times have you met with your SIP since September 2006</p> <p>5. Is your SIP a serving headteacher- does this</p>	<p>He did a joint LA review. He acted in the advisory service so he's done 2 and half days in total. He helped us do a science review- and it become very developmental. It has given us time to be developmental.</p> <p>Someone who has been a head understands that you have different kids, new staff- they understand.</p>

Improvement Partner	matter to you	<p>We've met several times for about two hours each time. It doesn't matter that he's not a head- he's very experienced at advisory work. In his case it's irrelevant. We've always got on- he's very sympathetic.</p> <p>Four meetings – lasts 1.5 hours.</p> <p>Four times</p> <p>Three times – each of 3 hours (max). The context of “light touch” has been lost – has disappeared here.</p> <p>There is an agenda driven by the LA and before I decided the agenda.</p> <p><i>Are you unhappy with that?</i></p> <p>It depends what their real function is. Are they answerable to the LA? The Borough has their role but there should be an opening for the Head's agenda.</p> <p>At her first meeting I probably floored her by having my LT and Chair of Governors there. It gave her an idea of how we work.</p>
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		<p>I have met with her several times.</p> <p>Five visits (a whole day) – we had an agenda for each, which we did together. I think there is the outline – he obviously has an agenda.</p> <p>Three times – about 2.5 hours.</p> <p>We have met about 5 times.</p> <p>Three times – the last time was really odd because I am going to another Headship – not as formative. We’re in a place that is very innovative.</p> <p>I have met with him 3 times (intro, PM and target setting). Didn’t come in Spring term but then I invited him in April to discuss Ofsted and School Improvement Plan. We work on the agenda together – he stays for an afternoon.</p>
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		<p>Ofsted inspector, consultant – but no headship experience. He is well networked, knows his stuff and keeps up to date. What matters is that you keep informed – he never thinks that ‘one size fits all’ – he doesn’t bring that baggage. I don’t think it matters that he doesn’t have headship experience. He is very keen to find the best way to work with <u>your</u> school, how can your school make the next step.</p> <p>It is important. If the SIP has been a Head recently then that’s really important.</p> <p>He hasn’t been a head, but he’s credible – comes from having been a deputy in a large school.</p>
<p>KR4:How do English secondary headteachers describe the relationship with the School Improvement Partner during the first two years of implementation</p>	<p>1.How has it been this year with your SIP</p> <p>6. The NRwS says the SIP is a “professionally credible critical friend” - what is your response to this</p> <p>7. Describe the first meeting with your SIP</p> <p>8. Describe subsequent meetings with your SIP-</p>	<p>It’s quite interesting- and I’m a SIP myself- my SIP is an acting head with a tremendous amount of credibility. He has credibility because he’s at the chalk face.</p> <p>It does describe my SIP and I hope it describes me in my work. I wouldn’t be happy with someone who didn’t challenge me- but someone without credibility couldn’t do that.</p> <p>I involve my two deputies. The SIP has to get to know everyone- needs to be part of the fibre of the school. It’s good that there’s a three year period – so if you can’t work with them, but if you get a good one three years is too short.</p> <p>Our SIP is one of the senior people in Devon curriculum services. Devon has appointed a number of</p>

	<p>duration, venue, attendees etc</p> <p>11. In your view has the work with your SIP impacted on your practice? (e.g. target setting, PM)</p> <p>12. How satisfied are you with your SIP- if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both</p>	<p>people. I value our guy's judgement.</p> <p>Yes it's an accurate description.</p> <p>We try to involve all members of the team- he talks to the governors as well.</p> <p>My personal SIP was "rule driven", very "data driven" – she threatened me with the LA. SIP's have to understand the context that they are working in – and she doesn't. Trying to explain to her the context and how careful you have to be in our use of data. She did give us very useful feedback on the SEF – and that was nice.</p> <p>I find the other conflict is in headteacher PM review – I think there is a real issue. Can one person carry out these roles simultaneously? Can they be adviser, supporter and inspector?</p> <p>If we were in a different context, and possibly I were a new Headteacher and less experienced, the support role is better from a network.</p> <p>It describes her perfectly. We don't socialise, I meet her at HT meetings. It's a challenge. The information I have is basically what she has.</p> <p>It does fit the person who I work with. He knows the answers to the questions.</p>
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		<p>It applies to my SIP. If I hadn't been able to make a good relationship. HE was careful to be challenging but not disrespectful. It's a healthy relationship.</p> <p>It's useful to have a critical friend relationship, so it would be better if they had read</p> <p>It's very easy to be complacent, it works for me, the CVA shows that, but there are things we could do better. All of the Kent SIPs have detailed questions – 14-19 diplomas – there is a list of things for them to do, to talk about.</p> <p>He never had this. He's too nice. I say that but we're working very hard but what could he say. I have an excellent AH who is very hot on data, so I am able to target. I can be judicious in my judgements.</p> <p>The relationship has been less of the critical and more of the friend. Part of the success is when you get someone who clicks. The SIP management matched us up very well. He is doing some extra work with us, I asked him to do so. We are part of the BSF, so the school is subject to a closure notice – the SIP isn't working strategically with me because of that. I am ready to move on because I have had to. It's been good to do, to provide a fresh pair of eyes and I always value that. Targets were agreed very happily. My PM was very straightforward. He was helpful in helping them to think about me as well as the school. He is very supportive and complimentary. He would be firmer if he needed to be.</p>
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	<p>He is certainly professionally credible. The target setting was much easier because he understands being in a school like mine. The LA didn't and don't understand and impaired our target.</p> <p>I'd like my SIP to be a critical friend but I don't trust him – I don't know him well enough.</p> <p>The first meeting – the autumn term meeting was a replication.</p> <p>We had an initial meeting, target setting and following that the PM meeting with my governors. In the Spring term we did some sort of monitoring activity so there was the same activity going on in each school but we had just done this with our LA monitoring work.</p> <p>It has been very effective as far as I am concerned. The unwritten agenda has been more effective than the written agenda. The SIP is the head of a school that has a similar content but is a few years ahead. The dialogue 'off the agenda' is more effective. The school has the same specialism. We had Ofsted a couple of weeks ago. I was able to follow her advice and that helped our Ofsted preparation. On the agenda – I think it's good to have a professional discussion with someone external to our school who knows our content. Our SIP has been challenging; the team is pretty new and that has helped us to give us a more realistic view of what we've been doing. There is now realism in our SEF; she asked us uncomfortable questions. We thought we were good – we were giving people a 'good' for lessons but our SIP made us think and so we revised on things and made them satisfactory – we</p>	
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		<p>have become more critical. She has done it in a way that has been constructive and given us a new perspective. She makes the new thinking a reality for us.</p> <p>Most of the time I meet him on my own. If he's coming to talk about.</p> <p>He mentions areas for discussion. They are given areas for discussion – 14-19, inclusion, ECM, G&T.</p> <p>He did interviews with members of LT and Governors. He left at 1pm today. He was asking them if I had consulted with the LT and governors. He is going to do joint lesson observation with me and I did this with Jerry as well. They can check up.</p> <p>He was working with them – looking with one at her training plan, director of sport about specialism (are we meeting our targets?), a middle manager (about LfM). Checking out the training patterns in the school. <i>Has the SIP spoken to Governors?</i> Just a few governors. He's checked out our SEF and given us lots of advice about it.</p> <p>Phil said we should up our rating to outstanding.</p> <p>About one hour each. I prepare for the meetings. In my office and sometimes I invite a T and L</p>
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person. I am going to invite my LT to SIP meetings in future.

He has kept the Chair of Governors well informed; we have looked at the SEF. He is coming to meet the Governors.

It hasn't been too painful' and at the first meeting her SIP 'didn't highlight the differences- just the areas of agreement' but at subsequent meetings 'he was careful to be challenging but not disrespectful'.

Gently challenging, not hammering me over the head. He has pulled me back and made me be more analytical. The experience has been fruitful and reflective. There's time for compliments and he has said good things where they've been justified- and I have to do the same

I really thought I was going to get someone who'd really engage with me. I don't want someone who will just say- 'very good Steve, that sounds great Steve'- I really want someone who is going to challenge me hard. I've only been doing this job a short time- surely there's more to learn

Appendix H

Semi structured interview 1

Date 14 June 2007

Biographical details

Name: Angela Smith

School: Gosbridge

Phone number: 01604 456789

Size of school: 1055

Number of years as a headteacher: 10+

Are you a SIP- no because of time pressures?

Anonymity, Change of name, Explain the research- is the interviewee happy to be recorded?

Questions that formed the basis of the interview

1. How many times have you met with your SIP since September 2006
2. How was your SIP allocated to you
3. How did you feel about the allocation
4. Is your SIP a serving headteacher- does this matter to you
5. The NRwS says the SIP is a professionally credible critical friend- what is your response to this
6. Describe the first meeting with your SIP
7. Describe subsequent meetings with your SIP-duration, venue, attendees etc.
8. What preparation do you do for these meetings
9. How are the outcomes of the meetings recorded- what happens to these records
10. In your view has the work of the SIP impacted on your practice (e.g. target setting, PM)
11. How satisfied are you with your SIP- if you could choose would you continue with the SIP programme, go back to the previous system or could you do without both?

SMT Hello is that Angela

AS Yes- is that Susan

SMT yes- thanks ever so much for agreeing to talk to me- is this still a good time?

AS Yes Susan- your PA and my PA have managed to find a space for us both to talk

SMT Thanks Angela. I thought I should tell you a little bit about my research project. I'm looking at the impact of school improvement partners on the leadership of secondary schools. Thanks for filling out my questionnaire and returning it to me

AS That's fine Susan- it didn't take very long- I appreciated that and it was easy to send it back to you too

SMT As I said in my email, I wanted to ask you a few questions about your impressions of the SIP, how the SIP has worked with you, the benefits of working in this way and about any problems you've experienced. Is that ok?

AS Yes- it was really helpful to get an idea from your email.

SMT Your responses to questions will be anonymised – I'm going to record the conversation so I can transcribe it later- is that OK? If you would like me to, I can send you a copy of the transcription.

AS I'm fine Susan- happy for you to record our conversation – don't need you to send me a transcript. We're both headteachers so I know I can trust you

SMT That's good Angela but if you are uncomfortable with anything, please say

AS Don't worry Susan- I will- but let's just see how we get on.

SMT Have you had a good day at school today?

AS Yes it's been fine- usual stuff though. You know, trying to get the staffing sorted for next year- are you fully staffed for next year

SMT Just a few gaps. Glad today has been fine for you. Could you tell me what you think about your SIP?

AS It's true to say that we're settling down. I have a SIP who was a head for four years. With the best will in the world I question her credibility. It's really unlikely that I'd ever ask her for advice- as I have my own network of people

SMT could you tell me more about your network

AS it's a really good network of people that I've built up- some are heads in this LA, some are people I've met at conferences and there's even one who works as an adviser- but I don't very often ask him anything- what do these people know- they haven't done the job we do and so it's usually about procedural stuff

SMT But what about your SIP though

AS As I said, I question her credibility- and I have real concerns about having a partner imposed on me- I think we should be able to choose the person- Accountability to the LA, DFES- would I really want to open up to that person- no way, you just don't know what you say will be passed on.

SMT What do you mean?

AS Well I could say- I'm a bit worried about something, say boys achievement in English- and before I know it it'll be all round the LA that Angela's got a problem with achievement. It's my problem to solve and I don't want anyone thinking that I'm not up to it.

SMT has your SIP raised any issues with you

AS Yes- boys' achievement is an issue and she wanted to talk about it

SMT what did you say

AS I told her about what we were doing- the strategies we're using and how we are monitoring it. That seemed to satisfy her. I'd already decided that this was how I'd respond – I think there is potential for real conflict in the role. Glad I've avoided it so far.

SMT What has it been like with your SIP then

AS My personal Sip is very rule driven and very data driven-she threatened me with the LA. SIPs have to understand the context that they are working in- and she doesn't. I tried- I've been trying to explain it to her- our context and how careful you have to be in when using data. She did give us some very useful feedback on the SEF- so that was nice

SMT what did she say about the SEF

AS She read our SEF- she asked for it and I gave it to her- apparently that's what we're to do. The LA used to do this but I suppose this is the new relationship now. She read it through and said it was very good and said it was accurate- I'm not sure it's as good as she says but I'm probably a harsher critic of our work than she will be

SMT why do you think that

AS Cause this is my school and I know it best. I live eat and sleep this place and my future rests in its success. Also, I've been doing this job for long enough now that I know what needs to be done and I can make sure it happens. I think another conflict, as I was saying earlier, is in headteacher's performance review. I think there's a real issue here. Can one person carry out these roles simultaneously? Can they be the adviser, supported and inspector? Don't think so

SMT Why is that?

AS If we were in a different context and possibly if I were a new head and less experienced, but the support role is better from the network nor somebody who you have to work with.

SMT how much time have you spent with your SIP

AS three meetings this year of, let me think, no more than three hours each. Yes, 3 hours is the maximum time the Sip has been at the school. This is more than we had with the LA though- the concept of light touch has disappeared here. There's an agenda driven by the LA and before I decided the agenda

SMT Are you unhappy with that

AS It depends what the SIP's real function is. Are they answerable to the LA? The Borough has their role but there should be an opening for the head's agenda as well.

SMT can you tell me about your first meeting?

AS I probably floored her by having all my leadership team and the chair of governors there at the first meeting. I don't think she was expecting that- it gave her an idea of how we work

SMT what do you mean

AS We work as a team and I don't have any secrets from my chair- he comes along to meetings and he sits there alongside others in my leadership team. I think it was a shock for her as there were errrrm, 5 plus the chair plus me- that's seven of us and her.

SMT why did you set it up that way

AS Well we didn't know what was going to happen so I wanted everyone there so that any questions could be answered

SMT and were they

AS Well, it was meant to be a more getting to know you meeting. So she met us all, all at once.

SMT And how are meetings recorded?

AS She takes the notes, sends me a copy- I make factual changes and she then sends them back. I give a copy to the chair of governors- I have a very supportive chair and so I'm happy to share the records with him

SMT How has working with the SIP impacted on your practice

AS I'm telling her what we're doing. She has been impressed with what we do but she hasn't been able to suggest anything different. She suggested we should do vocational ed but I rejected that

SMT why was that

AS it's not right for us- and it wouldn't work in our school- there are budget constraints and our parents would go mad

SMT was it a useful discussion though

AS No not really. It just showed her up. If I initiated the discussion I think I'd have someone I could discuss things with but there's a paradox in the roles- if I had a problem would I open up. There's a difference between a discussion and having a problem you need to solve

SMT what do you mean

AS Well- I discuss things with her that I know the answer to, I've already decided or perhaps if I think she might know more about it. But she doesn't even understand the issues of working in a girls school

SMT why is that

AS Girls schools are different from co ed places. I'd be much happier with a SIP who was from a girls school. It's just not right- but there again I know what I'm doing

SMT tell me more

AS When I first worked in Barnet- my first half-term- they welcomed me- I sat with experienced heads and I asked for their advice. There it was. It was honest and open. They are people who are really experienced and I heard them asking one another too. They trust one another and that trust is absolutely essential

SMT And with your SIP

AS they've tried to package it up into just one conversation- but we need lots of different ones

SMT yes

AS You have to have heads involved in the appointment of the SIP- so we get someone who we can trust. It's a problem with the role- I know if I speak to the a colleague he isn't going to speak to the Borough- but I don't know if the SIP will do that

SMT So what do you think should happen?

AS I'd have a proper mentoring system for heads, I'd probably still have LA but high quality people who could provide challenge. It wasn't great with the LA and it's not that brilliant now- so it hasn't made much of a difference

SMT Thanks very much Angela- I appreciate you giving up your time to help me with my research

AS That's fine Susan- my pleasure

SMT Would it be possible to talk to you again in the future about working with your SIP?

AS Yes of course- I'm sure our PAs will do their magic and it will be possible. Have you finished for the day now?

SMT Almost- I've a governors meeting tonight

AS I've one tomorrow but it will be fine.

SMT Thanks again Angela and best wishes. Good bye

AS Good bye

Semi structured interview 2

Date 16 June 2008

Biographical details

Name: Angela Smith

School: Gosbridge

Phone number: 01604 456789

Size of school: 1055

Number of years as a headteacher: 10+

Are you a SIP- no because of time pressures

Anonymity, Change of name, Explain the research- is the interviewee happy to be recorded?

Questions

1. Have you continued to work with the same SIP this year- if there has been a change, what led to this new relationship
2. What activities has the SIP engaged in whilst at your school
3. How has the SIP engaged with governors
4. How has the relationship with your SIP changed this year
5. How do you feel that the relationship has worked out

SMT Hello, is that Angela

AS Yes- good to talk to you Susan. How are you? Has it really been a year since we last spoke?

SMT Yes- it's a year plus a couple of days

AS Time seems to fly by in our job doesn't it. And where has today gone?

SMT Is it still convenient for us to talk

AS Oh yes, of course- we've the time in our diaries and it's fine.

SMT Thanks- I do appreciate the help and time you are setting aside for me As last year, your responses to questions will be anonymised – I'm going to record the

conversation so I can transcribe it later- is that OK? If you would like me to, I can send you a copy of the transcription.

AS I'm fine Susan- happy for you to record our conversation – don't need you to send me a transcript- wouldn't mind if you attributed my comments to me anyway

SMT That's good Angela but if you are uncomfortable with anything, please say. . I sent an email with the areas I'd like to discuss with you. Is that ok?

AS Yes- it was really helpful to have the questions in advance – I've had a bit of time to think about them

SMT So, could you tell me about working with your SIP this year?

AS Yes. I think probably what has happened the SIP has learnt more about the school and how it functions. All they have is paper and as you work through you get to know the people. The SIP understands now our reluctance to do certain things- telling us to do something says she doesn't know enough about us

SMT yes, could you tell me a little more about that

AS She understands that data has to be taken and treated with real care. Elizabeth has realised that if we didn't have higher targets, she said she'd report us to the LA. When I told the Director of Education he laughed out loud. She now has a much better feeling and understanding of the school

SMT I remember from last year that she'd threatened to tell the LA about your targets. Do you know if she spoke to the LA

AS No I don't know- don't think so. When I told the Director of Education, he didn't say that he'd heard about it.

SMT you said she had a better feeling and understanding of the school

AS Yes that's right. It's made it more professional. I still wouldn't go to her for advice though- I'd still go to a fellow head as they are the people who support me. But give her her due, it's a more relaxed atmosphere

SMT What do you mean?

AS Probably if I didn't have support I might contact her about things- it's not about her- it's just not the way I work. Perhaps if the school had a new head then it would be better

SMT are there things you will talk to her about now though?

AS Not really. We had Ofsted a couple of months ago- the day when I had the PIB, she was in- the best thing she did was leave- she left us to it. We didn't need her help or support

SMT What activities has she engaged in whilst at your school?

AS She has said to us, this is what I have to offer. She said I can see outstanding teaching and persuaded me to change the SEF gradings. Next week she's coming in and she's going to talk to the head of science and the G and T coordinator. She said she wanted to speak to HoDs and I suggested these two- people what are outstanding- the people what are really good and it's important she sees those people

SMT why

AS Well, it helps for her to see our best people. I know who the best people are and so she can meet with them

SMT How much time has she spent at the school

AS She's been in three times for three hours on each occasions- so 9 hours over the year. It is better- last year we had discussions about her reporting me to the borough- now there's some understanding.

SMT Has she worked with your governors at all?

AS she hasn't been to a meeting- when she comes in next week, one of the governors will join me and she'll give a report to him and it helps

SMT how does it help

AS well she just tells them what we're doing. She has nothing extra, additional to offer so it helps because they see that we're doing everything we need to.

SMT Presumably she came to your performance review

AS oh yes- I'd forgotten about that. It's not a very big occasion so we slotted it in to the first meeting of the year. Didn't take very long.

SMT are you happier with things

AS I'm more positive than I was last year. The issues I have are about my relationship with the Borough. There's too much duplication

SMT do you have an example

AS the AD for the borough wanted to come in and talk to me- so I said 'single conversation' they need to sort that out.

SMT and

AS There's too much duplication at the movement and that has to change. What's the relationship between SIPs and the Borough? What's the SIPs role? Are they there to support or to inspect the school under another guise? Can you have a partner – you

work together- can the partner be in an inspectional role. That's my real issue. If I had a real problem would I have confidentiality- where's the guarantee. That's the problem that still has to be worked out. Where do the SIP's loyalties lie?

SMT this has been really helpful Angela- thank you very much. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about

AS No- I think I've said all I need to say.

SMT Thank you so much Angela- I do appreciate it

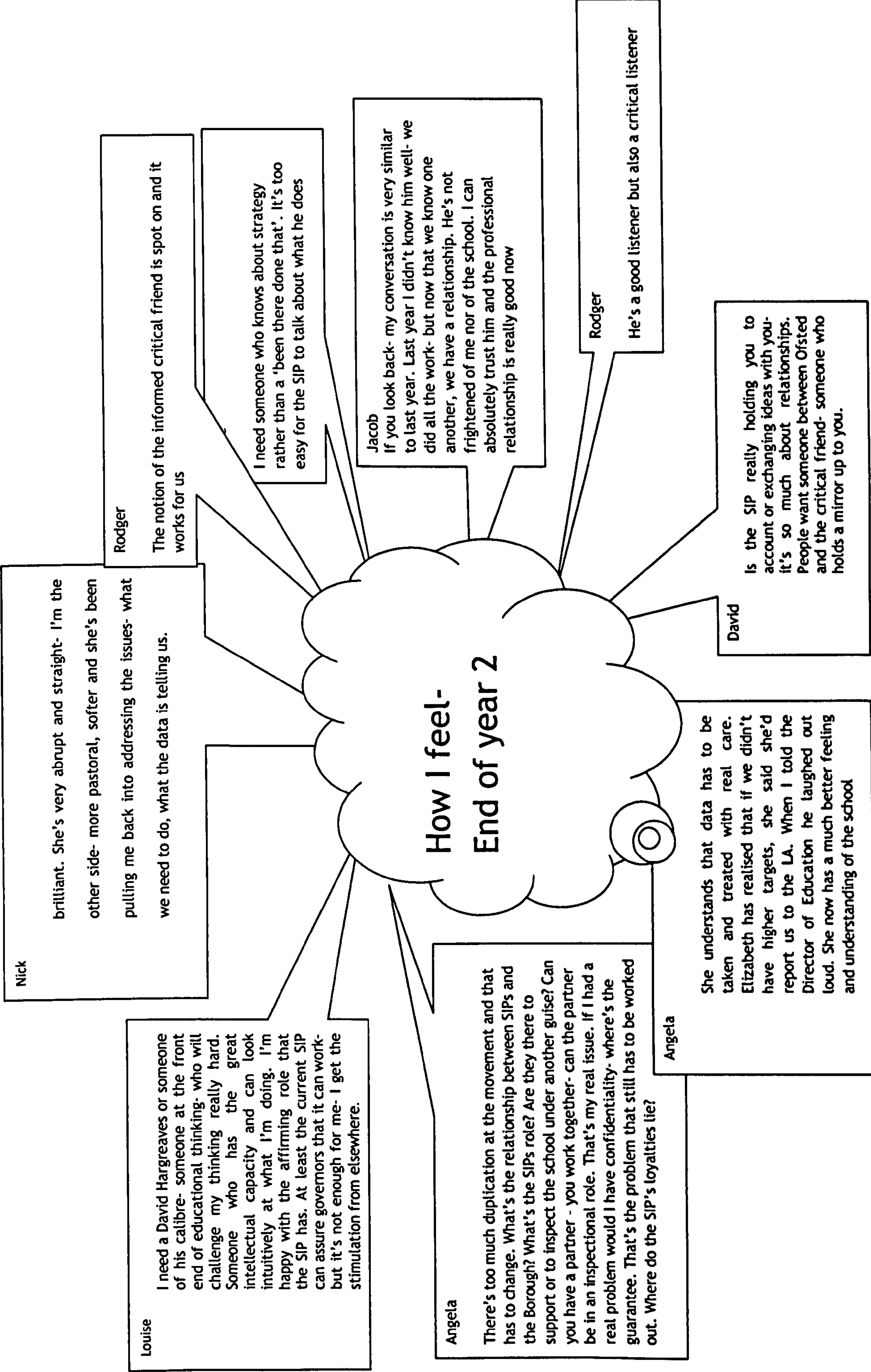
AS And good luck with your thesis Susan- it's really important work you're doing.

SMT Thanks and best wishes

AS Goodbye Susan

SMY Bye Angela

Appendix I



Appendix J

A table summarising the school information about the headteachers

Name	Time as a head (at time of questionnaire)	School size	CVA (in 2006)	% 5+ A*-C over past three years (2006, 2007, 2008)
Andrea	3 years	1071	972	25, 29, 19
Angela	12 years	1049	1011.3	100,100,100 (Selective school)
Anna	6 years	1310	999	66,65,69
Candace	14 years	1227	994.3	37,22,33
Clarissa	15 years	620	1066	9,25,23
David	2 years	1578	985	29,34,31
Jane	5 years	325	969.5	21,24,11
Joan	7 years	892	1011.1	69,78,79
Jacob	11 years	1042	1015	36, 52, 60
Joshua	9 years	930	1009	55,60,68
Janis	Less than a year	397	998.4	48,48,38
Louise	14 years	980	1007	100,99,100 (Selective school)
Mark	Less than a year	1062	998.1	34,29,38

Nick	1 year	490	1009	25,32,32
Rodger	15 years	1537	989.3	42,41,35
Steve	2 years	821	1001.2	28,27,26
Sally	13 years	965	991.1	34,38,45
Theo	3 years	717	987.6	27,39,28

N=18